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N·A·L SIGNET BOOKS

A Famous Novel of Unconventional Love

ARIANE

Claude Anet

SIGNET BOOKS

Complete and Unabridged

About This Book

THIS is a novel about love. First published in France in 1920, where it created a sensation that spread all over the continent, *Ariane* was widely and furiously discussed. A movie based on it starring Elizabeth Bergner was an equally popular success. *Ariane* was published in the U.S. by Alfred A. Knopf in 1927.

"Its theme is love only," wrote Claude Anet. ". . . I was attracted by the idea that love is in itself a subject, perhaps the subject *par excellence,* and that between two higher beings, the conflict which love unchains is sufficient to bring a dramatic interest to life."

The conflict, and the triumph, of the extraordinary young Russian girl, Ariane, and of her more than worthy adversary, Constantin, is a battle of the strong and the proud. In the telling of their story, Claude Anet isolates, pins down, and examines their passion, and all the delicacies and complexities of their relationship. Ariane and Constantin are seen face to face—outside society and social convention. Their battle is one for self-esteem, for power, for mastery, and for each other—a battle known to men and women everywhere. It is a variation of the Laurentian theme—though Ariane and Constantin succeed in the end as D. H. Lawrence's men and women never do. (The Russian background is incidental; the story universal.) Because Claude Anet has succeeded in distilling in all its purity the simple essence of love, he has created a book in which lovers of any age will take a special delight, and which they will lovingly recommend to one another. Herschel Brickell called it "A novel of love . . . a tense fragment from the oldest drama in the world. . ." *The New York Times* said: "It is a provocative, stimulating book whose searching, detached recital of two individual lives is uncommonly interesting . . . written with the fine perception and artistic craft that stands for polished French fiction."

ARIANE

BY

CLAUDE ANET

A SIGNET BOOK
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FIRST PART

BY WAY OF PROLOGUE

1. *From The Hotel De Londres to The Známenski School*

A SKY OF ALMOST ORIENTAL CRYSTAL, A LOVELY CLEAR, luminous sky, blue as a Nichapore turquoise hung over the houses and gardens of the still sleeping city. In the dawn and its silence, all that could be heard was the call of the swallows pursuing each other across the roofs and the acacia bushes, the luscious cooing of a dove in the tree-top, and, far away, the harsh creak of the axles of a country cart approaching slowly over the uneven cobbles of the Sadóvaya, the main street and the most fashionable of the town. Near the huge, dusty and deserted cathedral square, a wooden fence enclosed the backyard of the Hotel de Londres. The flat, long, three-storied façade of the hotel, which ran parallel to the Sadóvaya, was built of grey stone, depressing as a rainy day in autumn, bare of balconies, pillars, columns or ornament.

The Hotel de Londres, the town's leading hotel, was famous for its cooking. Gilded youth, officers, manufacturers and nobility patronised its celebrated restaurant, in which an orchestra composed of three skinny Jews and two Little Russians played, afternoon and evening, far into the night, assorted selections from *Eugen Oniegin* and *Pique Dame,* melancholy folk songs and gipsy tunes with broken rhythms. What parties were given in this fashionable restaurant, what brilliant suppers, what "orgies"—to use the phrase common to us all when we spoke of the gala nights of the Hotel de Londres!

The hotel dining-room consisted of two unequally large halls but there were no private rooms. So the people who wanted to sup away from the crowd took their bedrooms with a sitting-room on the first floor which Léon Davidovitch, the hotel porter, always kept free for his clientele.

This Léon, a Jew with narrow lifeless eyes, was the autocrat of the house and one of the best-known figures in the town. Provincial notables sought his friendship and stopped in the hall to exchange a few pleasant remarks with him. Léon was discreet: what is the price of the silence and good graces of the porter of a hotel as popular as this? How many pink notes and even twenty-five rouble notes had he not tacitly accepted, his pale face betraying not the slightest emotion, notes which the burning hand of a man wrought up with the idea of finding a bower for some amorous meeting had slipped into his? One must conclude that a great number of people thus thought to keep the secret of their happiness. Léon Davidovitch owned not less than three houses, proving that money in X—— rolled in, was acquired without trouble, spent with joy and that life was as torrid as the fiery days of summer on the plains of the southern "government," of which X—— was the capital. Every man in the province who made money, whether in mines, factories, or agriculture, dreamed ceaselessly of unforgettable nights in the Hotel de Londres and of the French wines he would drink there in the company of charming women.

One of Léon Davidovitch's three houses was situated in the suburbs, not far from the causeway where, by twilight and by night, the fine trotting horses, the pride of our province, drew couples fired to emulate the wind on that well-kept road. This house comprised no more than one floor above the ground floor. For the time being he had furnished the first floor and had installed there a crabbed old hag. Numbers of people had applied to rent it, for flats were scarce in the town which recently had developed with an amazing rapidity. The old crone's reply was always the same: the flat was spoken for. Nevertheless, no tenant came and simple souls asked each other why Léon refused a profitable lease. Others shook their heads. The fact was that often in the evening a carriage was seen standing in front of the house and often, far into the night, rays of light could be seen between the carefully closed shutters of the windows.

At the hour of morning on which this story begins, in the dawn of a warm day at the end of May, the great door of the Hotel de Londres was closed and the lights in the restaurant and the hall had long been extinguished. The wooden gate let into the main door of the yard opened with a squeak. A young girl appeared on the threshold and, for a moment, hesitated.

She was wearing the uniform of the best known of the high-schools of the town, a plain, brown dress with a pinafore of black glazed cambric. She had softened its severity by a white lace collar, which looked a little rumpled. Against the rules, the dress was cut slightly low, and displayed her long neck in all its delicate grace. On her lightly poised little head, she wore a hat of white straw with a wide brim turned down at the edges. Her head bobbed quickly to spy up and down the deserted street. After a moment's hesitation the girl stepped down on to the pavement. Behind her appeared a second girl, a few years her senior, fair, slightly insipid, slightly heavy of carriage, clad in a black silk skirt and linen blouse beneath a light mid-season cloak.

The girl in the school uniform stretched, looked up towards the sky, drew in a great draught of pure air, and, laughing, cried:

"Scandalous! Olga! it is broad daylight."

"I've wanted to go home for ever so long," returned the other in a grumbling tone. "I don't know why you stayed such a time. . . . And I've got to be at the office by ten o'clock; I shall have a scene with that tyrant Petrov. Besides I've drunk too much champagne. . . ."

The school-girl looked at her with pity, shrugged her left shoulder in a habitual gesture and made no reply. She walked at a rapid pace with a light and happy gait, making the high heels of her unprotected slippers clack on the asphalt of the side walk, her head high, looking about her full of pleasure at finding on her exit from a room full of smoke the unexpected splendor of a spring dawn. They

crossed the vast cathedral square diagonally and separated after having arranged a rendezvous for the evening.

The school-girl followed a street to the left of the cathedral. Suddenly she heard the patter of footsteps hurrying behind her and turned round. A tall student in uniform, a pick and mattock embroidered in gold on the lace of his cap, was running to catch her.

She stopped. Her face tightened to an expression of hardness, her long eyebrows knitted, and the student who had his eyes fixed on her, immediately fell into confusion. In the depths of nervousness, he said:

"Forgive me, Ariane Nicolaevna . . . I waited until you were alone . . . I could not leave you so . . . After what has passed . . ."

In a dry voice, she broke in:

"What has passed, pray?"

The young man's confusion reached its climax.

"I don't know," he stammered. "I don't know how to tell you . . . It seemed to me . . . I'm in despair. . . . You don't want me, do you? I had rather know it at once . . . One cannot live like this," he wound up, completely out of countenance.

"I do not want anything whatever of you," answered Ariane Nicolaevna clearly. "Understand that once and for all: I shall never repent of what I have done. And remember, too, that I have forbidden you to approach me in the street . . . I am surprised that you have forgotten."

Beneath the icy glance of the young girl, he hesitated for a moment, then, turning on his heel, departed without saying a word.

A few minutes later Ariane Nicolaevna arrived before a large wooden house. Shops occupied the lower floor. She climbed to the first and only floor, drew a key from her bag and cautiously opened the door.

The silence of the flat was only broken by the ticking of a tall clock hung on the dining-room wall. On tiptoe the girl went down a long passage and pushed open the door of a room in which a housemaid, half-dressed, slept on a narrow bed, her mouth wide open.

"Pacha, Pacha," she said.

The servant wakened with a start, tried to rise.

"Call me at nine o'clock," said Ariane, thrusting her back on the bed. "At nine, you understand. I have an examination this morning."

"All right, Ariane Nicolaevna, all right, I shan't forget. . . . But it is broad day. How late you come home! For the love of God, I beg you to look after yourself. Let me come and undress you," she added, making another effort to get up.

"No, Pacha, don't disturb yourself. Sleep a little longer. Thank God, I can dress and undress by myself," she said, laughing.

A few minutes later, everything was still in the big house in the Dvoranskaya.

At ten o'clock in the morning on the same day, in the famous school of which Mme. Známenskaya, the history professor, was the head, Paul Paulovitch, assisted by two of his colleagues, conducted the final examination of the pupils.

In the huge room, bright and bare with large windows, a score of girls had collected. Scraps of low-voiced conversation passed between them, muttered comments, short remarks feverishly exchanged. Sharp eyes shone in pale faces; a few pupils hastily turned the leaves of a history manual; others eagerly followed what was passing on the dais.

The interrogation lasted five minutes on some subject picked at random, during which the next candidate for examination meditated, seated at a neighbouring table. Ariane Nicolaevna awaited her turn, and twisted in her fingers the note she had just taken under the eyes of Paul Paulovitch.

A couple of hours of sleep had been enough to give her skin an almost infantile freshness. The clear, rather small, grey eyes were sheltered beneath the long arches of her eyebrows, which almost met at the bridge of a nose straight, clear-cut and regular. The delicately drawn mouth was

closed. Ariane did not give herself over to meditation of the subject on which she was to be questioned, but listened to the pupil who was standing in front of the examiners, uttering embarrassed replies. The grey eyes beneath the black eyebrows flashed, and it was obvious that Ariane was making an effort not to fly to her fellow-pupil's aid.

An usher seated at one side looked at her watch and went out. Two minutes later she returned, escorting the directress. The examiners rose, offering their chairs. Mme Známenskaya thanked them with a gesture and took the usher's chair, a little to the rear.

In the hall, a whisper had run from mouth to mouth. In low voices, the girls were communicating their impressions.

"There she is again!"

"She is always there when Ariane is being examined."

"It is a scandal; she protects her."

Meanwhile the mistress had scarcely seated herself before Paul Paulovitch timidly struck a few taps on the table and said to the pupil:

"I thank you."

The girl came down from the dais, and regained her place; her blushing features disappeared behind a handkerchief.

In a hesitating voice, the professor called:

"Koustnetzova."

Ariane approached. With eyes lowered, the professor asked:

"What is your subject?"

"Lord Novgorod the Great."

And without waiting to be questioned, Ariane opened her theme. She spoke with an astonishing aptness of expression. The most muddied questions became clear beneath her exposition; the most confused subject seemed easy. She classified each point according to its relative importance and without losing herself in details, drew a luminous picture in which each fact fell into its place in her scheme.

The examiners appeared to take the same pleasure in

hearing her which is derived from the performance of a great artist in a concert. Paul Paulovitch never took his eyes from her and on the impassive countenance of the mistress could be seen the interest with which she followed the deft and precise speech of Ariane. In the body of the hall, all faces were turned towards the dais.

"Five and a cross," said one.

"The prize for excellence and the gold medal," whispered another.

"Look at Paul Paulovitch," a third muttered. "It is obvious; he adores her."

"I have known that for a long time," replied a pale, serious child.

The five minutes sped, Paul Paulovitch interrupted Ariane Nicolaevna.

"That is enough, Koustnetzova; we are obliged to you."

An hour later the examination was finished. While the pupils were leaving the hall, Ariane waited to exchange a few words with the directress. Their conversation drew out. They were now alone. At last, in a burst of tenderness, which astonished the girl, Mme. Známenskaya leaned towards her and said:

"Wherever you may be, Ariane, don't forget that I am your friend."

In the hall, two girls were waiting for Ariane, their whispering broken by quickly stifled giggles. One was tall, thin and pale, with glittering eyes and jerky movements. The other was ugly, round-eyed and flat-nosed, but coquettish and fluttering. Both had somewhat bad reputations; they were sometimes seen wearing jewellery of which the origin was suspect, for they belonged to lower middle-class families of no substance. They accosted Ariane, and, walking along with her, caressed her, congratulated her, offered her a thousand compliments.

"Listen, Ariane," said the taller, "why don't you come and have supper with us this evening? We have got a party arranged. It's at that new country house that Popoff

has just bought." (Popoff was the wealthiest merchant in the city, a man of ripe years and repellent aspect.)

"He has got it up in a most original way. . . . Fancy, there isn't a chair in the house. Nothing but divans. You really ought to see it."

The little one broke in very excitedly.

"There will be an orchestra hidden in an adjoining room; the music can be heard, but the performers remain invisible. And then there is a very original novelty. The room is lit by candle ends, which go out little by little, one after the other."

Ariane asked:

"And who sups on these divans? I don't quite see myself at Popoff's side."

"Friends of his, very charming ones. As for that, why don't you go to Popoff's? He is madly in love with you, my dear, and dreams and talks of nothing but Ariane Nicolaevna. You really must come with us."

"Thank you, no," said Ariane; "Popoff is horrible."

"But how amusing! And then you ought to hear him sing. . . . He is astonishing; you would not think it was the same man."

"He can sing without me," answered Ariane, stopping, "for I won't come to see his country house or his divans or his candle ends either to-night or to-morrow. Tell him so from me."

"He will die of despair."

"Vodka will console him."

She left the girls who went on their way, much upset by this refusal and talking animatedly.

The taller said:

"I suppose she wants us to go down on our knees to her; it's absurd."

The little one:

"Popoff won't be pleased."

Ariane entered a rather small garden, which was not much more than an avenue of trees and rose bushes the length of the street. There Paul Paulovitch was feverishly

walking to and fro. He was a quiet inoffensive creature, dreamy and generous, terrified of everything and above all of being tête-à-tête with Ariane Nicolaevna, even though twice or thrice a week they met in this little garden after lectures. But each time Paul Paulovitch was paralysed by an emotion which scarcely left him the power of speech. On this particular day, Ariane, after escaping from her brief conversation with her two companions, seemed irritable, which only added to the professor's confusion. Still he summoned up the courage to ask her to share a seat. She refused; she was already very late and would arrive home after lunch was over.

He accompanied her, complimenting her on her examination, repeating the flattering appreciation of one of the examiners: "A child of genius."

Ariane, whose little head quivered lightly on her slender neck, drew herself up and muttered:

"Child! What impertinence! I'm seventeen."

Then she relapsed into silence. Abashed, the professor ended too by holding his tongue. They were walking swiftly down streets in which there was little life. The heat, for the first time that year, was already strong and heralded the burning summer of the South.

In this way, they came into the Dvoranskaya in front of Ariane Nicolaevna's house. Paul Paulovitch was paler than usual; he made an effort and began a sentence.

Ariane interrupted him:

"Do you know what I am thinking about, Paul Paulovitch? I appear preoccupied, but I am happy, unbelievably so. Do you guess why? No? Well, I will tell you . . . In a few minutes, I shall be in my bedroom. I shall find on my couch a lovely white dress, trimmed with Irish lace, cut low. And Pacha—you know Pacha? She adores me; everything I do is splendid in her eyes—Pacha will have laid white silk stockings beside the dress, and beside the couch, open white slippers. Then, Paul Paulovitch, I shall undress from head to foot; I shall hurl this terrible school uniform, this brown dress which I have not doffed for three years, to the ground. I shall dance on it; I shall stamp on it; I

shall kiss Pacha . . . I am thinking of nothing but that. I am free! Rejoice with me!"

She held out her hands to him. Paul Paulovitch listened to her and his face betrayed the struggle between various sentiments. The girl's happiness, her voice even, intoxicated him; so much so that he felt a dull grief in his soul.

Ariane had already left him and mounted the doorstep. At the door she turned:

"If you have nothing better to do, come and sup with me at the Alexander Garden to-night."

She disappeared. Paul Paulovitch remained motionless on the side-walk.

2. *Aunt Varvara*

At the moment when ariane entered the huge dining-room a number of persons were seated at a long table at the head of which was placed Aunt Varvara. She was a woman of some forty years of age with an irregular face in which at first glance one saw no more than two large very beautiful black eyes, which were of themselves enough to justify the common opinion of the city that "Varvara Petrovna was an extremely attractive woman." Her hair was dressed in coquettish fashion. A parting on one side divided her lightly waved brown locks. Her mouth was as well moulded as that of her niece, but her teeth were indifferent. Varvara Petrovna, well aware of it, took pains to smile with closed lips and with her luminous brown eyes. "She is irresistible," her friends would say at these times. She had remained slender. "When Aunt Varvara goes down the street," Ariane once said, "the people who follow her think they have got a girl in front of them." Even in her house, she dressed with the greatest care, a rare thing in Russia. She shod herself with elegance; her hands were manicured, her underclothing fine, and, out of doors, she invariably wore a black cloth tailored suit, the masterpiece of a good Moscow tailor.

Varvara Petrovna's life was the subject of inexhaustible interest to the inhabitants of the town. Of her past they recalled that she had abandoned her family as the result of certain obscure events, in order to take up the study of medicine in Switzerland; then, that she had returned to Russia in the position of *zemstvo* doctor to the borough of Ivanovo in our province.

It was just at that time that everyone was talking about her younger sister, the lovely Vera, with whom the famous novelist Lopovtsov, who was spending the winter in the town, had fallen violently in love. Just when the announcement of the girl's marriage to the writer was expected, the latter departed hurriedly for the Crimea, and the former to Ivanovo. She hid herself with her sister. No one saw her for six months. Then she went off to Paris where a year later she married Nicholas Koustnetzov, an engineer, whose business took him frequently to France.

Shortly after her departure from Ivanovo, it was found that Varvara's house sheltered yet another guest, a baby that Varvara said was the delicate child of a friend, which had been entrusted to her. This little girl had not been baptised at the village church, and, when it was eighteen months old, Varvara carried it off abroad, where she stayed for some time near her sister Vera, now married.

She returned alone. At this moment an event occurred in Varvara's life which considerably altered its course. It happened one night that she was summoned to the bedside of one of the biggest landowners in Russia, Prince Y——, who chanced to be spending a month on a neighbouring estate. She saved his life. The prince attached her to his train, took her round Europe and kept her at his side until his death, which occurred seven years later. Varvara Petrovna then returned to her native country with a fortune of a hundred thousand roubles, a pension of ten thousand roubles, and further rich with the wealth of experience gained in the course of the brilliant life she had led in the west. She purchased a house on the Dvoranskaya.

It seemed as if she had never left Russia. She possessed, as if she had always practised it, the art of passing the time

in doing nothing, and, with nothing to fill them, found the days too short. She rarely left the town; at the most she spent a month in summer on a tiny estate she had bought on the banks of the Don to provide her with milk, eggs and fresh vegetables. During her years of slavery at the Prince's side, she had exhausted to the point of disgust that love of travel so rooted in Russians. She reviewed her past as one looks at the scenery on a stage, admirable perhaps, but in which one does not dream of perpetuating one's life. One stands for a few seconds in the flame of limelight and under the eyes of a thousand spectators: then, the performance over, one goes home and closes one's door.

That is exactly what Varvara Petrovna did, but she left the door ajar for the quite numerous friends she soon made in the town. She had been installed for five years when her sister Vera Koustnetzova died of pneumonia at San Remo. She was alone there with her daughter Ariane. Koustnetzov rushed from Petersburg, brought his child back to Russia, and not knowing what to do with her, suggested that his sister-in-law should take her into her house.

When this news reached the house on the Dvoranskaya, Varvara's intimates, talking among themselves, decided without hesitation that she would refuse. How could she, with her freedom, accept the charge of the education of a child she scarcely knew! Varvara's friends were mistaken; she had scarcely received her brother-in-law's letter when without a moment's reflection she telegraphed to him at Petersburg to despatch her niece.

When Ariane was installed at her aunt's, she was a slip of a girl of fourteen and a half, precocious both in body and mind. She was extremely thin, but already formed, her arms rounded and her face noticeable; the direct look had a trace of aggressiveness.

"Now who the devil are you like?" said Varvara Petrovna to her. "Your mouth comes from our family, but you will never be as lovely as your mother. And from whom do you get that trick of watching people? Whose eyes have you borrowed? Not your father's, that is certain; he is insipid and fair. You haven't a trait in common with him. Never-

theless, I congratulate you, for you know what I think of him. . . ."

That was Varvara Petrovna's way of talking. The girl's eyes lit up, but she made no reply.

"Still, you please me. I was afraid you would have remained a little ragamuffin; but I see you are a young lady. We shall be able to talk freely."

The presence of the child led actually to no alteration in the habits of Varvara Petrovna. In spite of the inequality of their ages, the latter from the first day looked on Ariane rather as a friend than as a niece for whose education she was responsible.

No sooner had Varvara got away from her family than she had picked up the habit and taste for freedom, and had decided she could dispose of herself as she thought fit. Since nature has endowed the relationship of the sexes with a keen secret pleasure, why deprive oneself of it? With the sophistic intellect of the student, she saw no reason for depriving herself of such a healthy amusement. She had had friends at the university; on her return to her own country she had found them even at Ivanovo. During her travels abroad with the prince many opportunities had occurred to make comparative studies on the merits of westerners, and, on her return to her native town, she continued to live as she pleased. She had no comprehension of the importance which so many fanciful persons attach to self-surrender. In a phrase, she looked on love from the standpoint of a man. When the fancy seized her she would take a lover and leave him when she found another more to her taste. She did not imagine that people need either unite with transports of passion or part in floods of tears. In her eyes love was not a disease; a rupture should not bring a drama in its wake. So naturally did she behave that her lovers never imagined that they had the right to ask more of her than she gave them. She did not abandon them altogether, and the relationship of friendship succeeded without shocks and earthquakes to the more intimate one of love. On occasions, she did not disdain a renewal. In the early years of her settling down,

she was on several occasions obliged to go to Petersburg and Moscow. She had old friends there and stayed with them. On her return she spoke of her journey and the amusement she had got out of it in such a way that the lover of the moment did not take offence.

As you can see, Varvara Petrovna was a woman without imagination. The senses to which she refused nothing only carried her to the halfway house of passion. She dropped the reins on their necks; yet they did not run away with her.

Her code of love (for she had one) was based on two principles. She remained faithful to her lover up to the moment a new man attracted her. This she at once admitted to herself, for she had no sense of participation. She was one man's woman; only she changed him often. So she had never betrayed anyone. To betray a man, one must love him, be bound to him by bonds of sentiment. Moreover, Varvara had never up to then looked on her lovers as other than friends of a complementary sex, and the relationship which she had built up between them and herself was precisely defined. She wilfully flattered herself that she had put love in the exact niche it ought to occupy.

"You see, my dear," she used to say to Ariane Nicolaevna (Ariane was just fifteen and a half) "love is a delightful thing if you take it as it is. But romanticism is the source of all evils. . . . Anyhow, I do not think you are threatened with this dangerous madness. You have a good head on your shoulders and will not go astray."

The girl smiled her peculiar tight-lipped smile, from which nothing could be guessed of her thoughts.

Varvara Petrovna's second principle was that finance and love should not be mixed up. The morality of any Russian woman on this point is that of Varvara. Where money plays no part, everything is right; and whatever one does, so long as one is disinterested, one remains an honourable woman. Immorality begins with money. When as a girl in Geneva, she had scarcely enough to live on, Varvara would not have accepted either a dinner or a tram ticket from her lover, even though he were rich. In fact, as with many of her compatriots, it became something of an affectation.

When Ariane arrived from Petersburg, Varvara's intimate was a celebrated barrister from a neighbouring town, who came twice a week on business to the capital of the province. He stayed at Varvara's flat, where he had a bedroom. There Ariane had witnessed his supplanting by an engineer. From outside, everything passed off with propriety. But Varvara Petrovna never failed to detail to her niece, now her confidante, the merits, defects and peculiarities of her lovers.

"I am doing you a great service," she would sometimes say. "You won't get foolish ideas into your head. You will see things in their true light and one day you will thank me."

But during the last year a change had taken place in Varvara's life. After passing forty, she had conceived a passion for a doctor whose good looks were making conquests all over the town. The engineer had been sent about his business without formality, and Vladimir Ivanovitch had stepped into his shoes. The first six months were magical, but it was just then that Varvara became aware of the birth of a sentiment with which she was unacquainted. She was in love. This discovery gave her at one and the same time the most profound despair and the keenest joy. It seemed to bankrupt all her previous life. She no longer recognised herself. Like a man who tumbles into a bog and feels the earth giving beneath his feet, she did not know to what to cling. At the same time an unexperienced felicity possessed her: a wave of happiness flooded her. She daydreamed like a seventeen-year-old girl in love.

"Ah," she said to Ariane, "I did not know what happiness was! I have had eighteen lovers—why do I call them lovers?—friends, nothing more. And it's only now, when I am forty, that I meet Vladimir. . . . To think that he was living beside me and that I did not know him. . . . I can't forgive myself. . . . Oh, if you only knew what he is like."

She never stopped. The girl heard her in silence, still smiling, but this time she bit her lip.

Having known love, Varvara soon felt its storms. She thought she noticed that Vladimir Ivanovitch no longer felt the same sentiments towards her as before.

He still saw her every day, but without warning her of his coming. Often he even turned up at six o'clock, just when Varvara had gone out for her daily walk, and he no longer waited for her return as at the beginning of their liaison. Of an evening he now rarely went into the little sitting-room adjoining Varvara's bedroom. She had to make efforts to draw him there. He preferred sitting in the dining-room, where there were always, besides Ariane, her friend Olga Dimitrievna, who for many months had taken her meals at Varvara's, and several other habitués of the house.

He had little trouble in manufacturing excuses: his wife had come back from the country; or she was seedy; he had patients to visit; or a headache, and so on.

Varvara Petrovna was greatly distressed. This woman who had never asked for anything lowered herself to beg for a rendezvous, and that in front of her niece and friends.

She was tormented by jealousy. Vladimir must have a new mistress. She took to spying on him. She watched him narrowly, wondered. She followed his glances, noticed the tone of his words. She who never left the house, took to running all over the town, passing her lover's house a hundred times a day. She even went to the length of following him in a carriage. But who is to know what a fashionable physician does?

She had lost her gaiety and the carefree air of the happy woman for whom everything runs well and who has only to let herself live.

On the particular day when Ariane came home from her last examination, Varvara was still at table with several friends, although luncheon was long finished.

"Did your examination go well?"

Before the girl could reply, the door opened and Vladimir Ivanovitch appeared. It looked as if he had lain in wait to hurry in Ariane's footsteps. He was the sort of man who is always in a hurry, always agitated, nearing fifty, clean shaven, with hair going grey. He had the finest teeth in the world and very sharp eyes beneath eyebrows thatched with long black hairs. An extreme self-assurance betrayed

itself in his smallest gesture. Varvara started up and held out her hand.

"How late you are," she said.

Vladimir Ivanovitch kissed Varvara's hand, but, dropping it as quickly as possible, flung himself at Ariane, who had not stirred.

"I have come expressly to congratulate you, Ariane Nicolaevna; my daughter tells me you had a triumph. As for that, I never doubted that you would."

He pressed Ariane's hand between his. She abruptly withdrew it. Varvara had noticed the gesture.

"Sit down, Vladimir Ivanovitch," she said. "I will give you some coffee."

"No, I have not the time; I have a thousand errands to run."

"You must drink a cup of coffee; I won't let you go. Then, perhaps, I might come out with you for an airing. It is the first day of summer. What are you doing, Ariane?"

"I am staying at home until seven," answered the girl. "Nicolas is coming to fetch me in a carriage. I shall go and sleep for a while; I am tired."

"Oh, I was forgetting," said Varvara; "there is a letter for you from your father in your bedroom."

Ariane knitted her brows. At the mention of her father's name her face darkened.

A few minutes later there was no one in the dining-room.

3. *The Letter*

As soon as ariane reached her room, she saw her father's letter in the middle of the table and recognised his formal handwriting. The letter had been registered.

Before reading it she undressed from head to foot and hurled the brown robe of her uniform across a chair. She took down her hair, which was long and thick, put on a

light dressing-gown and stretched herself barefooted on the couch.

The letter began in this wise:—
My dear daughter,

In reply to your letter of May 10th (the business formula brought a grimace to her fresh face), *the following are my plans. It does not seem to me suitable for you to go to the University. We have enough déclassée women in Russia without you. You are intelligent; use your intelligence then about the house, in bringing up your children. I hope you will marry soon. Our friend Pierre Borissovitch, whom you no doubt recall, has treasured the keenest remembrance of you, and his dearest wish is to marry you. As you know, he is a reliable man who will be able to assure you the most pleasant kind of life. He has, besides this, a first-class position in business, and I can answer for him as for myself. I am going to one of the Caucasus baths for a cure. When I come back to Petersburg in September, I shall rely on you. We will pass the autumn at Pavlovsk, where Pierre Borissovitch has a charming villa . . .*

There were four pages in this vein.

The girl could read no further. She crumpled up the letter.

"How beastly!" she exclaimed, and threw it into a corner of the room.

She remained day-dreaming for a second or so, figures drifting before her lidded eyes. She saw herself again as a little girl of eight on the knees of her godfather, Prince Viaminski. The strange man! how he loved her. He seemed to live for her only! When she went to his house, he gave her in turn splendid pieces of newly-struck gold and exquisite chocolate bonbons. She ate the chocolates as quickly as possible; the coins she hid in her school satchel, for her mother would not have allowed her to accept them. She carried them about with her, when she went to her classes, twenty or thirty chinking pieces, which even when

wrapped separately in tissue paper, clinked dully at every step she took. Her godfather, she had learned later, had asked if he might adopt her. He wanted to bring her up according to his own ideas and have her always with him. . . . His hands were very white, very cold; she used to shiver when he stroked her arms or her cheeks. . . . Everything misted before her.

In the silent room, the yellow blind drawn down over the window caught the light and turned golden beneath the rays of the setting sun.

She dreamed on still. . . . The prince was close to her. He looked at her with such intensity that she was oppressed by it. And suddenly—how did it happen?—she felt her godfather's cold hand on the lower part of her leg. . . .

She opened her eyes and saw Vladimir Ivanovitch seated on the couch where she was lying. He had one hand resting on the girl's bare ankle and sat there motionless, his eyes fixed on Ariane. As soon as he saw she had awakened, he leaned towards her.

"Forgive me, Ariane Nicolaevna, forgive me—I knocked at your door and as no one answered I came in. . . ."

She did not let him finish.

"Your hands are cold," she said, "like my godfather's. It is horrible. Let go of my ankle at once. . . ."

While she spoke, she pulled together her dressing-gown which had fallen open, without taking her eyes from those of Vladimir Ivanovitch. She spoke in a tone which admitted of no contradiction and the doctor withdrew his hand.

"And now, get up at once."

There was such an accent of authority in the voice of the frail young girl that Vladimir Ivanovitch rose.

Without hurry, Ariane pulled herself together, got up from the couch, slipped a pair of mules on to her feet, turned towards the door, opened it, and said with calm assurance:

"Now, go! Believe me, it will be better. . . . I did not know it was for me you came to the house."

The doctor took her hand, drew her towards him, and with his face quite close to hers, muttered in a low voice:

"Think what you will of me. . . . The truth is that I cannot live without seeing you. I must talk to you. . . . Come to my house one day."

"If you invite your daughter, who is my age, to share our conversation," returned Ariane in a disdainful tone.

Vladimir Ivanovitch stood tongue-tied, but he recovered himself.

"I am always alone at seven o'clock in my consulting room. . . . I shall wait for you."

"Ah! of course, you are a doctor. From the way things are going, that might be useful. I shall keep you in mind, if it is necessary, Vladimir Ivanovitch."

He recoiled slightly; his eyes glittered, but without answering, he went out.

An instant later, as she was dressing, three discreet taps were struck on the door which opened to let in Olga Dimitrievna.

She had lived with Varvara Petrovna for some time, but since she had obtained a post in the municipal offices, had left her from a desire for freedom, to rent a little room where she slept. But she dined at Varvara Petrovna's every night and passed the evening with Ariane Nicolaevna. She was deeply attached to her. Whether or not this feeling was reciprocated is rather doubtful. In any case the two girls were on a footing of mutual confidence and rarely left each other's side, although Olga was five years older than her friend. One must emphasise some peculiarity of Ariane's character, some unfathomable assurance in herself, which established her on equal terms with people older than herself with whom she was on intimate terms. One curious example has already been noticed in the relation of Ariane and her aunt. Olga hid none of her private thoughts from Ariane, and this expansive fair girl was certain that she knew all about her friend. But if a calm observer had overheard one of the lively conversations between the two girls, he would have noticed a certain expression which sometimes crossed Ariane's face when

looking at her bosom friend and would have sought some explanation. The close tie between Ariane and Olga carried with it certain advantages to the latter. In spite of her extreme youth, Ariane was known to collect round her a court of admirers ready to execute her slightest whims; and curious ones often entered her head. Picnics, suppers, sleigh parties, dances, Olga shared all the treats and Ariane was not to be invited without her friend. She played the unflattering part of chaperon, but managed to get out of it for herself some decided benefits, which are hardly in the tradition of a character with a minor rôle.

Now in the room, she scrutinised Ariane and said with a mixture of envy and admiration:

"I don't understand it. You have supped; you have drunk champagne; you have done God knows what; you have slept scarcely two hours; you have gone through an examination and look at you! fresh as if you had slept all night."

"You can add, my dear, that I have my worries," answered Ariane. "At last I have had a reply from my father. Everything is over between him and me. Here, read his letter."

She held the crumpled paper out to Olga, who read it attentively.

When she had finished, she looked across to her friend, who seated before a dressing table, was putting up her hair.

"Well . . . ?" she said.

"Well," answered Ariane, "I have done with him. It is not difficult to find money in a town like ours."

Olga Dimitrievna ran towards her. She was violently upset. . . .

"I know what you are thinking of," she cried, "but it is impossible. . . . Swear you won't do it. . . . I could not bear the idea. . . . You would be ruined."

She had bent over her friend, taken her in her arms, hugged her; tears welled up in her eyes.

"Go to your aunt, to Nicolas, to the devil, but not to the man you are thinking of. . . . Promise me."

Ariane repulsed her gently.

"First let me do my hair; that is the only important thing. What a passion you have for dramatising things! And now you are crying! . . . Is it your business or mine? You know perfectly well that there cannot be any question of money with my aunt. She is like that. What is one to do? . . . We are very fond of each other. I am not going to spoil the better part of our relations for a miserable question of interest. No, let me arrange it as I want to."

She had risen and leaned affectionately against the shoulder of Olga, who was wiping her eyes.

"How silly you are, little misery! Go and put a candle in the church for me and don't trouble your head. I shall not ruin myself quite as easily as you imagine. Do you remember the ordeal by fire in the Middle Ages? One had to cross a flaming fire-pit without getting burned. Well, you may be certain that I shall leap it and that the flames will not touch me."

She broke off and strode up and down the room. Suddenly she stopped in front of Olga Dimitrievna, and with her face radiant, said:

"Do you know who has just left this room? Vladimir Ivanovitch, my dear."

In reply to the incredulous gesture of Olga Dimitrievna, she told of the surprise of her awakening and the scene which had followed it, not without mixing in the tale a certain number of dramatic and piquant details which did more honour to her imagination than to her veracity.

Olga listened with an excited curiosity and when the tale was done, sighed and said:

"How attractive he is! . . . He, here, on this couch! Oh, I should have been unable to resist . . . !"

They chattered for some time on this inexhaustible theme. Pacha interrupted them by announcing that dinner was served.

Before the meal was over, Ariane rose and made her excuses to her aunt.

"Nicolas is waiting for me below," she said.

Then turning to Olga, "I shall be back by nine o'clock, and we will go to the Alexander Garden together."

4. The Fiancé

Outside the house door was standing a little victoria with pneumatic-tired wheels drawn by a pair of handsome black horses of the famous strain they breed in this province. On the pavement a tall, stout young man, tanned and bearded, walked up and down, hurriedly drawing a few whiffs from a cigarette which he instantly threw away, only to light another. At short intervals, he stopped, looked up at the balcony of the first floor, consulted his watch and then returned to his pacing. Nicolas Ivanov was known to the town by two qualifications: as an amateur of horseflesh, and as the one-sided fiancé of the fantastic and already famous Ariane Nicolaevna. He was a peculiarly uncivilised creature who was rarely seen, had no friends, and spent the greater part of the year on an estate some thirty versts away. In the town he had no more than a *pied-à-terre* of two rooms in a bourgeois flat. He neither drank nor played cards; nor was he known to have had any liaison. His father had long been dead; his mother lived in the Crimea. It was rumored that her mind was deranged and that she was confined in the clinic of a well-known physician. His solitary life had made Ivanov taciturn and he evinced a real difficulty in talking. He hesitated for words, withdrew, contradicted himself, stopped short in the middle of a phrase and finally relapsed into the silence he preferred. His face was not unattractive with its large blue eyes beneath dark brown eyebrows and hair, but his complexion was pale, his mouth thin and his glance uneasy. Mothers of families of girls had long tried to capture this rich prey, for Nicolas Ivanov was supposed to be worth nearly a million roubles. They had achieved nothing by their advances.

One evening someone brought him to the annual ball given by the Známenski School.

On his arrival, Ariane, one of the stewards of the enter-

tainment, offered him a flower. Nicolas took the flower, scrutinised the girl in a prolonged embarrassing stare, stammering his thanks, and in the end dogged her footsteps for the whole evening. While she was dancing, he never stopped watching her with a soppy smile. Then, leaving the ballroom, he rushed to the bar to swallow several glasses of wine to give himself courage. The evening was not over before in a fit of heroic temerity he begged Ariane to marry him. Ariane—she was now sixteen—looked him up and down from head to foot with the acme of insolence and laughed in his face. But on the following morning he appeared laden with flowers at the house of Varvara Petrovna who in vain tried to explain to him that her niece was not yet of age to marry. On the day after that, he brought an engagement ring with the name of Ariane engraved on the inside and the date of the ball. He proclaimed to the entire town that the day Ariane Nicolaevna Koustnetzova finished her schooling, she would become Madame Nicolas Ivanov. Thenceforward every day flowers were delivered to Ariane, who ended by accepting as a pleasantry these lovely daily flowers and the rarer carriage drives she accorded Nicolas Ivanov.

One can give no idea of the capricious despotism beneath which the sixteen-year-old tomboy held this kind of Colossus who was nearly twice her age. The curious thing was that it was not little by little that she had reached consciousness of the absolute power she held over him. From the first day she had realised whom she had to face and that Nicolas would be wax between her childish fingers. She regulated the number and length of his visits. Nicolas only came to see her at her own times. God only knew what would happen should he dare to present himself without permission at the house on the Dvoranskaya! One day for some urgent reason—what, does not matter—he arrived unexpectedly in the dining-room. Without saying a word Ariane retired to her bedroom and refused to receive him. Often she forced him to spend a week or two in the country. Sometimes she authorised him to escort her to the theatre of which she was an habitué; and at

which she rarely missed a performance, for she passionately adored the dramatic art, went about with actors, declared that she would herself become a comedienne and that life was nothing without the limelight. But it would happen that about the middle of the evening, she would go on to the stage or away to gossip in the artists' dressing-rooms and forget Nicolas who came home alone, growling and gritting his teeth.

Once she tried the following experiment. At ten o'clock on a winter's night, when Nicolas was drinking tea in her room, she said:

"Nicolas, I am going out: I have an appointment."

"I will go with you," he said; "where are you going?"

"A man is waiting for me at the corner of the cathedral square, but you must not know who."

He looked at her with astonishment. Then, after a second, taking himself in hand, said:

"Very well."

They went out together, and when by the light of a street lamp she saw the young man she was looking for, she said good-bye to Nicolas, enjoining him to go home as quickly as possible.

To understand the finer points of this game, it must be understood that Nicolas was desperately jealous, and that evidence was not lacking for it to be believed that Ariane had intrigues in the town, the clearest being that the girl made no mystery of it and talked about it unceasingly.

For instance, she would say:

"Oh, Nicolas, do you know who has come from Moscow? Maklakov's eldest boy; I believe I am in love with him. He is irresistible. . . ."

And a hundred similar remarks cropped up night and day.

Shouting with laughter, on the same evening as the adventure, she told her confidante of the experiences of the cathedral square. Used as she was to the caprices of her friend, the latter could not refrain from saying:

"Ariane, you really are naughty."

Ariane stopped laughing and answered gravely.

"Well, no doubt I am naughty, but why the devil should I not be naughty if it amuses me?"

The fat, fair girl was thunderstruck. Ariane went on: "Would you like me to tell you something which you would never find out for yourself? It is exactly because I am bad that Nicolas loves me. You who are as good as a loaf of bread, he will never love."

At this notion she started dancing round the room, for she was beyond everything very childish, had these fits of wild gaiety, put out her tongue at people in the street, played tricks on her companions and knew as no one else did how to exasperate her professors without ever giving them cause for a grudge against her.

The most surprising thing is that Ariane was right. Nicolas Ivanov, the only and spoilt child of a rich family, who had never met any obstacle to his caprices, to whom nobody had ever said "no," who had never had other than easy conquests over complacent women, had at first looked dumbfounded, as if in the presence of an unintelligible phenomenon, at this frail girl who addressed him in tones of command. He had obeyed at once for the simple reason that he felt no force within himself to withstand the mysterious power which emanated from Ariane. During long hours of solitude, he had turned this strange problem over and over in his head: why did he submit to the slavery to which Ariane condemned him; and furthermore, why did she behave to him in this fashion? The solution he sought suddenly became apparent to him. "She only puts me to these trials in order to assure herself of my love, and if she multiplies the experiments it is because I am not indifferent. If she did not love me she would leave me in peace. She tortures me, therefore she loves me. . . . She is a girl to worship."

Thus, the more Ariane made him suffer, the more grateful he was, the more he bound himself to her. He could not conceive being able to refuse to obey the girl's whims. And the harder the task, the happier he was to conquer himself and so win the love of this peerless girl. The day

after he had escorted her to her appointment with a rival, he knelt at her feet and said:

"Ariane, accept my thanks; yesterday you gave me the greatest proof of love that a man can ask. Bless you. . . ."

For sole answer, the girl shrugged her shoulders and pirouetted on her toes.

She played an even more terrible trick on him.

Frequently in the evening, she allowed him to take tea in her bedroom. They would talk for a long time. Nicolas, on these occasions, recaptured his powers of speech, occasionally even some eloquence. She had him sit beside her on the couch and made brilliant soft eyes at him. The large youth soon put his arm round a slim waist, unconfined by stays, drew nearer and nearer to the girl, and in the end his lips fell on Ariane's naked round, firm arm and smothered it with kisses.

Half lying on the couch, she seemed not to notice it; she seemed far away from the passionate scene.

"Do you love me?" hazarded Nicolas, sighing.

The girl made no reply.

At last, Nicolas, losing control of himself, attempted a decisive attack. Ariane slipped through his fingers.

"It is too hot for you in here. You will be ill. Go and get a breath of air, Nicolas." She moved into the dining-room, where Olga Dimitrievna was drinking tea with one of the frequenters of the house.

Nicolas fled like the whirlwind, saying good-bye to no one, leaped into his carriage and bade the coachman drive like the very devil down the road. In the icy winter's night he left his cloak open and the driver from his box heard the *barine* uttering incomprehensible ejaculations into the night.

"May the devil fly off with her! I'll kill her! . . . Faster! Faster! The slut! . . . I adore her!"

This evening for the first time that year the air was as soft as a summer's night. Quickly and smoothly the carriage glided on and the girl huddled beneath a great black silk

cloak which hid her white dress, lay in her corner as if benumbed, and did not feel the pressure of Nicolas' arm around her waist. The thin horn of the moon glittered to its wane. Occasionally when the road passed through a copse of acacias the penetrating scent of the clusters of their flowers flooded over Ariane. Then it might be the more subtle perfume of tall grassed meadows which stretched on each side of the track. The softness of the atmosphere, the dark limpidity of the sky spattered with gold, the quiet of nature soothed the girl's jangled nerves like balm. She forgot her companion; she thought of nothing; silently she soaked up the calm of this lovely evening.

Nicolas long kept his peace but at last risked a few sentences. Receiving no reply, he grew bolder and became more explicit. He told Ariane that from to-day she was free, that she had ended her career at the school and one period of her life. Nothing now stood in the way of the realisation of the project meditated these eighteen months; it only remained to fix the nearest date for their wedding. On the day after the marriage, what would she like to do? Travel abroad, stay on his estate, go down to the Crimea? He awaited her decision.

The girl remained abstracted. Nicolas grew restless.

"Answer me, I beg you," he said, in an anxious tone.

She turned towards him and looking him in the face, said:

"Nicolas, do not torment me. I am unhappy. . . . In a few days you shall know all about it. Now, it is time to go home."

The big man sat overwhelmed. Ariane had never spoken to him in this fashion. Never had she told him so much of herself as in these three sentences. He felt obscurely that something tragic—what he could not guess—was looming up. What was happening? Here was Ariane, a queen to whom the whole world bowed down, unhappy. She was making an appeal to his pity. . . . It was beyond his understanding. His head was in a whirl. Suddenly tears rushed to his eyes and he floundered into a crisis of weeping.

The girl's hand fell on his fevered one. So they came home without uttering a word.

At the door she said to him in the same tone of gentleness:

"Au revoir. I will call you soon."

5 *The Alexander Garden*

THE ALEXANDER GARDEN WAS THE PRIDE OF THE TOWN. Situated hardly ten minutes from the cathedral, it offered a host of amusements. A committee of local notables administered it for the public benefit. The entrance fee was fifty kopeks or twenty-five to subscribers. In the centre was a raised track, for cyclists, and two tennis courts surrounded with trellis work. At one end of the terrace overlooking the track there stood a summer theatre with the stage roofed in, but with the spectators' seats in the open air; here operettas and comedies were played. At the other end stood a restaurant with spacious rooms and flowered balconies, run by the proprietor of the Hotel de Londres, who brought there during the season his celebrated chef and his miserable orchestra. On summer evenings the terrace, the theatre and the restaurant glittered with lights. Officers and officials, merchants and manufacturers met their wives, sons, daughters and mistresses here. Actresses strolled to and fro, when the performance was over. A thousand intrigues were ravelled and unravelled between the theatre and the restaurant, beneath the crude glare of the electric bulbs. Further down the paths lost themselves in the shadows and offered the charms of mystery to couples anxious for concealment. Here echoed passionate murmurs, shrill and stifled laughter, hurried footsteps.

On this particular evening, the two girls crossed the long terrace packed with its animated crowd, exchanging greetings to right and left, but without stopping. As they

reached the restaurant, a man seated in the shadow cast by a balcony, rose and approached them. Olga Dimitrievna gave a start.

"Of course, he is there," she exclaimed, and pressed her friend's arm to draw her on. But Ariane stopped and held out her hand to the man who was coming to meet her. He was a man of middle height, with a fat, well-tended face and blinking eyes beneath somewhat heavy lids. His ashen skin proclaimed bad health. He wore his moustache cropped English fashion and the hair at each side of his head cut close, while his skull was completely bald. He had heavy puffy hands. He walked slowly leaning on his stick. He dripped obsequiousness, held your hand in his, took you by the shoulder, leaned towards you to touch you when he spoke to you. For some years, the engineer, Michel Ivanovitch Bogdanov, had been retired from business: he was a well-read man, refined, of inquisitive mind, but with something disturbing about him difficult to define, although it was distinctly felt. He had been much talked about although nothing had actually ever been alleged against him. Then his name had been mixed up in a sad story which had happened in the town the previous year. One of the most charming girls in society had killed herself at the age of eighteen. The reason of the suicide remained unknown. It was one of those cases of disgust with life so frequent among the youth of Russia whose nerves, at once overpitched and feeble, are incapable of withstanding the first shock of life. In the girl's room, letters from Bogdanov were found, obscure letters, very literary, very complex, from which no meaning could be drawn save that between her and Bogdanov some intimate connection, possibly only of the spirit, had existed. Still public opinion, irritated by the mystery, made Michel Ivanovitch responsible for the suicide and people looked askance at him. This was the man chosen by Ariane Nicolaevna, no doubt out of bravado, to see frequently and publicly to hold in long conversation. Michel Ivanovitch seemed to derive an acute pleasure from it. The brilliant

wit of Ariane blossomed. He talked to her always in the most respectful way, not as to a child, but as to a woman of superior culture with whom one can freely discuss the highest questions. Without exactly saying so, he let her understand that in him she might always find a devoted friend, above and beyond all social conventions and that between people of their intellectual stamp all barriers erected as against the mob, were down. From these talks a somewhat material philosophy of life was evolved which came down to the fact that money plays a great part in life, that at any moment anybody may be suddenly forced to seek it, that no one is sheltered from the blows of fate and that if they were to strike Ariane Nicolaevna, he, Michel Ivanovitch, since fate had been kind to him, would be only too happy to put himself at her disposal. This had never been formulated with the crudity here set down; not a word had been breathed which could shock Ariane Nicolaevna or at which she might have to cut short her interlocutor, for he possessed the gift of being able to imply things which he could not explain clearly. But as a result of all this conversation they had held, there emerged the facts that he had made offers of service and that she had comprehended them. Everything, it must be understood, was cloaked in a spate of subtle and etherealized words, which made of the most material questions a supersensitive something beyond worldy interests, something akin to a barter of souls, a sublime negotiation of the business of the intellect.

The sure instinct of Ariane had not deceived her. Michel Ivanovitch was at her disposal if she stood in need of him. As for the price which must be paid for these services, that there was no question of it goes without saying. But then had Ariane thought of it, since Michel Ivanovitch's proposals appeared to linger in the kingdom of perpetual vows? The girl was flattered to see this enigmatic creature whom the whole town discussed, come to swell the train of her slaves. Bogdanov was a highly unusual man, and the compliment he paid her carried a rare enough scent.

Accompanied by Olga Dimitrievna, who would not have released her arm for anything in the world, Ariane drew the engineer from the terrace into a darkened walk.

With the frankness she always employed, she at once began on the question which preocupied her.

"Do you know," she said, "that I shall have need of you?"

"Incomparable friend," he replied (he loved these elaborations of speech which he stressed the more by accenting those which possessed something old-fashioned or ridiculous), "you know I am entirely at your service, entirely; only too happy to serve you."

"Well, I want to go to the University, and I am having difficulties with my family."

"Oh, the family, the family, the abominable yoke. . . . Verily, slavery. . . . A mind like yours, Ariane Nicolaevna. . . . What suffering! . . . I thank you for having thought of me. I am touched, really touched. . . . But have you thought of one thing?" (He took one of the girl's hands between his and held it.) "How can I submit to losing you? What will become of me in this barbarous town? I cannot imagine now to resign myself to surrendering the precious minutes which you now accord me so willingly." (He was whispering so close to Ariane's face that Olga Dimitrievna could scarcely catch his words.) "In any case, it must be thought over, talked over, talked over at length. You will call me up on the telephone, will you not? At your own time. . . . Nothing shall prevent me. . . . You may be assured of it, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart."

Ariane withdrew her hand. She hesitated an instant, then turning to Olga Dimitrievna, said:

"Wait for me here; I will be back in a minute."

And leaving her friend speechless, she disappeared into the shadows.

"Michel Ivanovitch," she said, "I do not know why I am approaching you. I have not thought it over. Possibly I am wrong. . . . But I like clear understandings, and one must speak frankly. I need money to go to the University.

Can you lend me some? I say 'lend,' because there are some tens of thousands of roubles which come to me from my mother, and which I shall have when I come of age. Will you be my banker? It is a business transaction I am proposing to you, a purely business transaction. It must be looked on in that light, I beg you. I wish to owe nothing to anyone. Therefore, you must treat it as I intend or not at all. And I want an immediate answer. Can you lend me some money and what interest will you ask on what you advance me?"

"But, my friend, my precious friend," answered Michel Ivanovitch, "I do not understand. . . . Really, I am quite lost. Business between you and me is quite impossible. Even to think of it! You, Ariane Nicolaevna, need a few miserable thousand roubles. But they are yours, yours without conditions, with no conditions whatever. . . . My one reward will be to think that I, all unworthy, have been able to contribute towards the development of a rare personality. It is an honour, a great honour for me. . . . Only, I admit, I shudder at the idea of losing you. . . . My wretched health forbids me to live in Petersburg or Moscow. . . . I would have to be sure that you would not forget me, and that you will come back each year during the holidays and that you will take care of me as of an invalid. I am a sick man—it is true, a sick man who does not ask for very much . . . only to see you a little each week. . . . You do not know, Ariane Nicolaevna that the only days in which I feel myself alive are those on which you are good enough to do me the kindness of chatting with me. The charm of your mind is an incomparable remedy against evil, the sound of your voice even gives me strength. . . . It is a miracle, a real miracle! And since you permit me to say it to you, I suffer miserably in only meeting you by chance in a crowd and always with your friend, who is charming, but whose intelligence cannot be considered on a plane with yours. . . . If you had any pity for me, you would grant me a few hours of conversation, calm, far from intruders, at my house. . . . It would be an act of charity. Your gift of vitality is so precious, my dear, that you com-

municate it even to the dying! Do you know what I call you? The Queen of Sheba. Yes, you remember the Queen of Sheba in the *Tentation de Saint Antoine,* 'who knew a whole galaxy of tales each more diverting than the one before'? Everything you tell me of your marvellous childhood, of your days among us, is more richly coloured to me than the beautiful stories of the East. . . . That is the only thanks I ask of you."

Ariane in her driest tone, which contrasted curiously with the pathos of Michel Ivanovitch in the extremes of emotion, said:

"And how many times a week shall I be the 'Queen of Sheba' at your house before I go?"

Michel Ivanovitch remained speechless.

"But, my love . . ." he began.

"Answer frankly, I beg. I want to know all the conditions of sale."

"I cannot bear hearing you speak so. . . . Sale! . . . You misread me completely. . . ."

"If you do not give me an answer this minute, I leave you and will never speak of this again."

Michel Ivanovitch hesitated:

"I do not know . . . two or three times a week. . . ."

"Put it at two. And for how many hours shall I tell stories?"

"Really, you are cruel; this pinning down is terrifying. . . ."

"Well, I will fix it myself. It will be twice a week for one hour. These are your terms. . . . It is dear . . . I will think it over. . . . Au revoir. . . ."

He restrained her.

"One word more. . . . I am going to change my abode. Yes, I am not comfortable at home. The house is too noisy. Besides I have lived there a long time. It is full of memories. Do you know I cannot live with memories round me? . . . They assail me. . . . I am a sick man, Ariane Nicolaevna, be very sure. So I have taken a little house in the suburbs, very quiet, isolated, the little house that belongs

to Léon, yes, the porter at the Hotel de Londres. . . . I shall have it to myself. . . ."

Already Michel Ivanovitch was moving away, leaning on his stick, dragging his leg behind him.

The supper party brought half a score of people together. Ariane and Olga were the only two girls. Noticeable were Paul Paulovitch and the tall young student who had accosted Ariane in the street at five o'clock that morning as she was emerging from the Hotel de Londres. On this evening, Ariane's favourite was a student with a small, well shaped head, black as night, but whose eyes were blue and whose teeth were marvellously white. They had had some vodka and were drinking champagne. Olga Dimitrievna was looking tenderly at her neighbour; her hand resting on his, she was assuring him in a caressing voice that she was sad to death and that her soul was sick. Ariane sparkled with life and wit. Never had she been more gay, never more brilliant. She gave a lead to everyone and from her bowed lips sped epigrams barbed like arrows.

But suddenly, as the conversation turned to honour in love, she changed her key, and with a new accent which all noticed, she said:

"Honour, what is that? A girl who sells herself for money has her honour just as much as a woman who has no lover. Who can reckon from the outside where lies honour and where shame? It is a sentiment buried in our depths, of which we alone are judges—I could sell myself," she exclaimed looking fixedly at Olga, who trembled, "and yet remain honourable in my own eyes."

"What are you saying?" nervously interjected the fair young man.

"Yes," went on Ariane, "suppose I have no money and that I feel in myself an unappeasable need, the duty of developing my intellect, of going to the University, in taking my share of that wide culture for which I am made. I shall not dream of ruining the ideal I am pursuing by losing time in giving lessons to little idiots at two roubles

an hour. I must have money. Whom shall I ask? . . . The lover I love? That is impossible; one must not mix up money and love. But if a man whom I do not love, in return for the few hours he will possess my body, assures me of the possibility of a rich intellectual life, is it not my duty to accept the bargain? . . . Shall I not remain as honourable and as faithful to myself by accepting it as a bargain and by paying in the only money I possess? Society can condemn me. What is society? A motley of fools and a bundle of prejudices. Let it judge me as it likes. But in my own eyes I remain an honourable girl. . . ."

Half the guests applauded furiously. Paul Paulovitch bowed his head.

"She is right," cried one.

"That is the real human morality," said another. "Bravo!"

Olga Dimitrievna burst into tears.

6. *Stormy Days*

THE INTIMATES OF THE DVORANSKAYA WERE DISTURBED, for the character of Varvara Petrovna was going through a curious transformation. Once she had been a gay, lovable, care-free woman, invariably good-tempered throughout the changing course of a day. Now, hour after hour, she seemed sad, preoccupied, agitated, in fact hardly mistress of herself. She who had never had an unkind word for anybody, took to saying the most spiteful things to her oldest friends who exchanged nervous glances, fearing a breakdown.

Vladimir Ivanovitch, the handsome doctor with the iron-grey hair, was always about the house. But he came and went, seated himself at table for a few minutes at times when Varvara Petrovna had company. If he entered the little room which lay in front of her bedroom, it was in an off-hand way, with a cigarette between his lips. He no longer passed long evenings as he had used to do at

Varvara's side. And he, too, had lost the calmness and assurance which formerly he was never without.

With Ariane, Varvara's behaviour was strange. Sometimes she overwhelmed her with caresses; on one pretext or another she clung to her, stopped her from going out, heaped her with presents. Sometimes on the other hand she attacked her in public, or banished her and, passing whole days without saying a word to her, appeared to know her no longer. The girl submitted to these changes of temper with indifference.

One day, when her aunt was in a gay and expansive mood, Ariane—it was shortly after her final examination—broached the subject of her intended departure for the University, and laid before her aunt the difficulties she had had with her father. Varvara did not like her brother-in-law, whom she never saw.

"Your father has always been a fool, my child," she said, "and you are much too intelligent to live with him. As for his plans for marrying you off, they are absurd. You are only a child. What do you know of life? Have you ever had a lover?"

She broke off, laughing, looked her niece in the face, and went on.

"As a matter of fact, have you a lover? You know everything I do; I have never hidden anything from you. But when I think of it, what do I know of you? Go on, talk, little mask."

The girl smiled without replying.

Varvara continued:

"You have the town at your feet. You intoxicate men like a devil. But what do you give of yourself? Still I have only got to look at you: you are obviously of our blood. At your age, your mother had had one romance. And for myself, I lived as fancy led me. And they tell me that the girls of the present day have made great progress and outstripped us. Come, be frank for once. . . . What do you do with men? I can see you lead them as you will. . . . Oh, I envy you," she exclaimed, after a moment's reflection. "Once upon a time . . ." (Varvara Petrovna sighed). "In any case,

you will not leave me," she concluded. "You are happy here, free to go out and come in at whatever time suits you. What more do you want? . . . I shall not part with you."

There was something pathetic in the last sentence, and Ariane felt it. In vain she tried to sway her aunt. Varvara would listen to nothing.

The truth was that by a long road she had come to a curious state of mind. She could not but notice that Vladimir Ivanovitch always came at times when Ariane was in the house, that he relished the brilliant conversations of her niece, that he sought opportunities of meeting her. At first, she felt a dull irritation, but she soon came to see that Ariane's presence was an infallible way of attracting her flighty lover and that should the girl disappear Vladimir Ivanovitch's visits would become more and more rare. She had, therefore, reached the point when to see, only to see, Vladimir Ivanovitch was the one thing that counted with her. For the rest, she said to herself, "What risks am I running? . . . Ariane is only a child. In her eyes the doctor is hovering on the brink of old age. She gets attentions from good-looking young men. It is from their ranks that she has already taken a lover or will soon. Vladimir does not interest her. She must know life as I do to understand the exceptional in him."

Poor Varvara saw no further than this. She held Ariane to bind Vladimir to herself without realising the dangerous game she was playing.

So it was that Ariane failed when she told her aunt that it was a necessity to her to go to the University.

At the end of the conversation, she looked her aunt in the eyes and said simply:

"Very well. It is you who have willed it . . ." and went out, leaving Varvara disturbed, meditating on the meaning of this enigmatic phrase.

The same evening Ariane, after having made sure that no one was within earshot, and could overhear her, went to the telephone, asked for a number, and spoke one brief sentence into the mouthpiece.

A MONTH passed. It was at the height of a warm summer when a cataclysm fell on the house in the Dvoranskaya. About eight o'clock one evening, on her return from a drive, Varvara Petrovna found the door of the flat open and so was not obliged to ring. Her step was quick and light; unheard, she crossed the dining-room. The door of Ariane's bed-room was standing open and at the end of the room she saw the girl, clad in a light dress of white, leaning against the wall. In front of her, his hands thrust against the partition, penning in Ariane, leaned Vladimir Ivanovitch, so close it seemed to Varvara that her lover's face touched her niece's.

She retained enough strength to reach her room noiselessly; then she rang and the whole household soon knew that Varvara Petrovna was stricken. They hurried round her.

The following day she summoned Ariane and said to her in an impersonal tone:

"I have changed my mind about this business of yours. . . . I have no right to keep you here. You must live your life according to your taste, and study if it pleases you. So go to your university, Moscow, Petersburg, Liège or the devil. I will give you enough to live on. With two hundred roubles a month you will be a wealthy student, you can have pretty dresses, delicate underclothes and Paris scents."

Ariane's reply staggered her aunt.

"Of course, I shall go to the University," she answered, "as I decided a long time ago. But I do not need any money. I have made my arrangements, thank you; I am free and shall always be so."

It was vain for Varvara to try to make her niece talk. Her curiosity was aroused, but she got nothing by it. Ariane went out without giving her the slightest enlightenment.

Left alone, Varvara underwent a disagreeable awakening to the fact that she knew nothing about her niece whom she had seen born and who had been at her side for three years. There was something obscure, a mystery

which she was unable to probe, in the apparently open and pliable girl. It came to Varvara for the first time that she had no hold over Ariane; she slipped from her. Who was she?

Greatly troubled she could not refrain from discussing it that evening with Vladimir Ivanovitch and from telling him of her fears. He shared her alarm. In the emotion which gripped them Vladimir was unable to conceal from his mistress that he was madly in love with Ariane Nicolaevna. The scene was curious and moving. The two lovers mingled their tears. It was long since they had had an hour of such deep intimacy.

Towards midsummer, unpleasant rumours concerning Ariane Nicolaevna began to fly about the town. On two occasions, habitués of the Hotel de Londres asserted that they had seen her late at night passing through the corridors. One of them mentioned that he had seen her after midnight entering a room where "champagne was being drunk." The other declared that at a late hour he had met the girl coming down the main staircase of the hotel alone. The advantage evil tongues took of these tales may be imagined. No doubt Ariane Nicolaevna was not the first to whom lovers were ascribed, still some moderation must be maintained even in a town like ours, where rigidity was not the fashion. Where is a Russian who would be surprised at a girl having flirtations and overstepping the bounds? These are things for which one never takes the trouble to find any explanation or excuse, and only idiots affect surprise at them. But the fêtes, the suppers at the Hotel de Londres, the inevitable publicity, that is where scandal begins. Ariane Nicolaevna was not discreet. Neither girls nor married women really liked her. She had had too much success. Nearly every man who came near her fell into her toils. On the other hand, Ariane made no effort to conciliate the women. There flourished in her a mixture of haughtiness and teasing, which, to tell the truth, made her hated. She delighted in ruining the most established unions, destroying happy households, whether legalised or the reverse. It really seemed as if she was pos-

sessed of the devil and that she had made up her mind to avenge herself—for what, was not known—by turning the men's heads, preferably of those whose liaisons had been the most notorious. What she gave them, no one knew. At any rate the worst was conjectured and the multiplicity of the lovers ascribed to her allowed of no further indulgence.

With regret, it must be added, that a more definite scandal sprang up with which her name was connected. About eleven o'clock one evening, two men about town who had eaten and drunk more than well, decided to go out in the company of some women to the little house in the suburbs which belonged to Léon, the porter at the Hotel de Londres. They knew it well, having on more than one occasion in the past taken advantage of the discreet hospitality it offered to people wishing to conceal their felicity. They were unaware that since the beginning of the summer the house had been let to the engineer, Michel Ivanovitch Bogdanov.

They drove to the place and rang the bell. No one answered. Annoyed at the silence, they began beating on the door. It opened at last, and they found themselves face to face with the old servant who assured them that the house had been taken by Bogdanov, and that they must go away without creating a scandal. She was unable to convince them; they would not listen to what she was saying; they were set on going in and having a drink. The old woman screamed; they pushed her to one side and began to mount the stairs. In the passage Michel Ivanovitch appeared with a stick in his hand, and ordered them to leave. They knocked him about but he was able to escape and get into a room where he telephoned for the police. At these alarums a door opened on to the passage and a young woman, her face half covered with a scarf, slipped out running to the street. The two women who had stayed in the carriage believed they caught a glimpse of the lovely and elegant Ariane Nicolaevna, whom all the town knew.

By the morrow, everyone had heard about it. A thousand details were added. The girl had been caught in Bogdanov's

bed beyond question. She had fled in a cloak lent her by one of the women. Others said she had fainted, that the police had had to fetch a doctor, and so on and so forth. Everyone of the facts was narrated as unquestionable by people certain of what they declared.

The scandal was enormous. Ariane Nicolaevna continued going about, visiting the Alexander Garden, supping with friends as if the rumours did not concern her. Nevertheless, a week later, she spent ten days in the country at her aunt's estate.

I HAVE forgotten to mention that prior to this last scandal, Ariane had summoned to her house the man who called himself her fiancé. She held a long conversation with him and broke to him the news of her departure for the University. Nicolas had not failed to hear the thousand rumours which were flying about the town apropos of Ariane Nicolaevna. It is needless to state that he had not credited a word of what had been told him. At people who spoke thus, he had stared in such a way that they suddenly broke off, then changed the conversation.

He received Ariane's news without surprise. He seemed to have foreseen it. He went through no crisis of despair, but in the quietest and most assured tones explained to her that he understood her decision, that she had the right to work for two or three years further, but that he was not giving her up, that he would wait and that in the end they would be husband and wife, for it could not be otherwise. "It is written in heaven," he said in a formal phrase.

Following this conversation, it was some time before he left his estate.

At the beginning of September, Ariane was ready to set out. At the station itself, on the evening of her departure, a curious scene took place. She was there with Varvara Petrovna, Vladimir Ivanovitch, the doctor, Olga Dimitrievna and several young people. At the carriage door she kissed her aunt. Suddenly a sort of Colossus pushed through the group of her friends; Nicolas Ivanovitch, for it was he, pushed Ariane into the compartment in which

Olga Dimitrievna was sitting. He was paler than usual and seemed beside himself. He drew himself up opposite the girl, looked at her for a moment, then dealt her a great blow of his fist which threw her down on to the seat. Nicolas shuddered, fell on his knees, and, seizing Ariane's skirt, kissed the hem several times. He got up and, abandoning his hat which had fallen to the ground, fled into the night.

The third stroke of the bell rang out; the engine whistled and passed on its way, leaving the eye-witnesses dumbfounded at this attack.

SECOND PART

1. *Boris Godounov*

ONE EVENING—IT WAS IN APRIL—CHALIAPINE WAS HEARD for the first time that season at the Moscow Opera in the part of Boris Godounov. Nothing could be more brilliant than the appearance of the opera house, in which every seat had been taken three weeks ahead. The frogged uniforms of the officers and civil servants, the enamel of their decorations, the flash of ribbons, the bright dresses of the women, the glimmer of pearls and the glitter of diamonds built up a rich medley of colour and extravagance.

Ariane Nicolaevna was seated in the fourth row of the stalls. Next to her, although seven o'clock had struck, one seat remained empty. Indifferently Ariane took stock of her neighbours and from time to time consulted the programme which she rubbed between her fair hands. She turned and raised her eyes to the second gallery. With difficulty she made out—one little bright spot among the hundred similar spots—the smooth features of a student with gold epaulettes. The student's face was turned in her direction. She gave him a friendly nod to which he vigorously replied.

The orchestra was tuning up. The stall beside her still remained empty.

Ariane was in ill-humour, an ill-humour which had lasted over several weeks. The six months in Moscow had brought her none of the magic delights she had promised herself. She felt isolated, lost in the immense city. In her own home she had been queen; here, her career had to be slowly made from the bottom rung. Ariane had the determination, but infuriating experience had filled her with disgust. In the solitude in which she had found herself and in the boredom of family life (for she lived—a last concession

to her father—with a married uncle with whom she could get on no more than with his wife), she had frequented the theatres and the brilliant Art Theatre in particular. One of the leading comedians of the company had caught her fancy and she had attended all the pieces in which he had a part. In the end, she had made his acquaintance. They had gone for motor rides together and had supped in restaurants and at his own rooms. Then suddenly after a few weeks she had perceived his mediocrity and had left him without a word in the most contemptuous manner. An after-taste of bitterness dwelt with her from this affair. She turned to work. Her professors had deceived her. In short, she bore a grudge against Moscow for the disappointments she had suffered there.

On the stage, before the door of the monastery, the people were beseeching an unseen Boris to accept the crown and to end their misery. The sadness of their antiphonal prayer tore the soul.

At this moment a man entered the row in which Ariane was seated, stepped past the girl with a murmured apology, and seated himself in the empty stall. Ariane noticed that he was tall, of no definite age, with a touch of carelessness and assurance in his bearing. A few minutes drifted by, then her neighbour, of whose appraising glance she had several times been conscious, asked her in a low tone:

"Who is singing *Boris* to-night?"

She turned a surprised face to him.

"Chaliapine, of course."

Her neighbour uttered an "ah" of satisfaction, smiled and added:

"Presently, in the interval, we will talk."

Ariane repressed the inclination to laugh which seized her, and remained silent.

The curtain fell at the end of the first act and the house lit up.

Her neighbour recommenced:

"What will you think of me? Still, my ignorance is explicable. I only arrived in Moscow to-day; as I was coming

into the Hotel National at seven o'clock, I heard quite by chance that they were doing *Boris* and I ran here."

"But you had no seat," said Ariane, interested in spite of herself.

"Oh," he replied, smiling. "You must know that always and everywhere there is a seat for me. The woman in the box office repulsed me, it is true, but in the hall an old woman, who undoubtedly was waiting for me, offered me some sick person's ticket. See how simple it is."

"And you always succeed like that?"

"Of course."

The rising of the curtain upon the entrance of Boris cut short a conversation which both were enjoying.

In the interval there was a general exodus. Her neighbour said to Ariane:

"I am dying of hunger: I have not dined. Do me the kindness of coming as far as the buffet with me, for I cannot separate myself from you."

"I am not alone," she replied; "there is a student with me. He stood in the queue for twenty-four hours to get two tickets, one in the amphitheatre and one down here."

"All the more reason for getting away."

Ariane Nicolaevna followed him.

During the rest of the piece, their acquaintance progressed so rapidly that during the last interval he suggested escorting her home. She hinted at the student who had ordered a car for this purpose. Then changing her mind, said:

"Still, it will be an excellent lesson."

So, when the curtain had scarcely fallen, they took to their heels like two school children at the breaking-up of a class. He suggested supper. Quite out of the question. He wanted to take a carriage. She would not have it. She had decided to return on foot in spite of the fact that she lived in the Sadovaya, half-an-hour from the heart of the city. They waded through the mud and the melted snow. The holes in the cobbles, the difficulties and obstacles of the path legitimized the offer, not refused, of an arm. He

watched her as she chattered. Over the smart and low-cut evening dress, she had put on a huge black coat, and on her head an astonishing little cap of soft felt, which she had drawn all rumpled from one of the coat's pockets.

"Will you," he asked, "since you love music so much, accept an invitation to hear *Prince Igor* with me the day after to-morrow?"

"You will not get any seats."

He stopped, stood before her and took her hands.

"Don't you know that I always have what I want? Therefore, we shall hear *Prince Igor* and this time, as we are old acquaintances, you will not refuse to sup with me."

"All right, if you get seats, I accept. But everything is taken, you may be certain."

They had reached a fine building of flats in the Sadovaya.

"Here, I am, at home," she said.

"Before I leave you," he asked, "let me have your name and your telephone number."

He wrote at her dictation, then he held out a card.

She read: *Constantin Michel.*

"That is not a name," she observed.

"Still it is mine."

It is possible even from the birth of a liaison to find some moments for rational conversation.

SENANCOURT, *Of Love.*

2. A Supper Party

TWO DAYS LATER, CONSTANTIN MICHEL AND ARIANE NICOLAEVNA were seated side by side on a couch in the famous Hermitage restaurant. Ariane was in a radiant mood. Constantin was letting her talk about herself, getting the keenest enjoyment out of the stories she was recounting. He had already got to know Varvara Petrovna; he knew that the girl had some kind of semi-engagement with Nicolas Ivanov, who had suffered, even before the wedding, some

bitter experiences; he was not unaware of the supper parties at the Hotel de Londres, nor of the band of admirers who had surrounded the brilliant Ariane there. The Alexander Garden with its gala-nights, its supper parties, its illuminated terraces, the dark walks where one might wander, rose before him as the most enchanting of Russian gardens. In a few lively strokes Ariane Nicolaevna had been able to bring to life the core and the chief characters of her past existence. He was seeing as with his own eyes the tripping walk of Varvara Petrovna and her irresistible smile; the miserable Nicolas cut a sorry figure in the picture; a few phantoms sped by, half-shadowed in mystery, upon whom Ariane, who piqued herself on telling everything, shed as it were no light, leaving it to her companion's perspicacity to guess by a hint.

Thoroughly amused as he was, Constantin Michel was still more perplexed. Who was this imperious young girl, wayward, witty and intelligent? She understood like a woman. Occasionally a shadow of seriousness came into her eyes. The forehead was self-willed and already reflective. But on the other evening, when she had buckled on her cloak and donned the improbable little hat which she wore at the University, she looked like a child of sixteen. "Of course she comes from the south," he told himself, "but still, however precocious the young girls there may be, one needs several years of experience to lay up the treasures of worldly wisdom, with which she is trying to impress me." He interrupted himself at this point in his reflections to ask brusquely:

"Which reminds me, how old are you?"

"What reminds you?" she replied, surprised at the words which had no relation to the story she was telling at the moment.

He explained:

"When I look at you, you seem seventeen. When I listen to you, you have seen thirty years and used them well. So, I do not understand . . ."

She broke in. "Does one have to understand a woman? One takes her, which is simpler."

He was startled and sat for an instant dumbfounded. Then, suiting himself to the colour lent to the conversation by Ariane's rapid interjection, he laid before her the doubts which possessed him concerning her age, and how she had appeared to him facet by facet as a child and as an extremely experienced young woman to whom one does not talk nonsense.

Her lips preserved an ironic curl, and when he had finished, she let fall a "Not bad" in the tone of a connoisseur, who applauds a sensational feat:

"Still," he replied, "according to the moment, I would lay even money on seventeen or twenty-five."

"As usual," she said, "the truth is between the two."

Then the conversation strayed.

A little later, as they were finishing supper and through the partition of the room were carried odd echoes of gipsy songs played by an orchestra near by, Constantin Michel leaned towards the girl to kiss her. Ariane Nicolaevna did not defend herself, but turned her head so that his lips met her cool neck where it joined with her ear under her hair.

She remained motionless in his arms and it was he who drew back a moment later. Then he said:

"What scent do you use? It is delicious."

Ariane looked surprised and answered simply:

"That, too, is my secret."

There was a silence.

Constantin broke it deliberately by telling Ariane in a tone very different from that of their previous colloquy, that he liked frankness, possibly too much, but that a simple manner of realising and of telling things seemed better to him, and that once more he would tempt experience, even though it cost dear.

"In reality," he went on, "isn't that the best way of pleasing a girl, the fineness of whose spirit I now appreciate? Do I want to win you? I admit it without beating about the bush. How shall I succeed? With you, Ariane Nicolaevna, shall I have recourse to the means which men are used to employing when they want to seduce a woman? Shall I let you think that you are the first to whom I have

knelt? . . . You delight me infinitely. Possibly, as you are here, you find me sympathetic. With you, I cannot imagine feeling the boredom which is after all our only enemy, but a mortal one. I want to see you more and better and every day . . ."

He broke off. Ariane made no comment. A little embarrassed, he said, "Oh, help me, Ariane Nicolaevna. I have not the trick of making speeches."

"I was waiting for the end promised by such a fine beginning," she answered.

"So be it," he said. "I will go on. Have you read the *Reisebilder?*"

She shook her head; she appeared distrait.

"In the *Reisebilder,*" Constantin went on, "Heine tells how he came one evening to a village where he had to pass the night. He saw a lovely girl at the window, busy watering flowers, and he said to her in so many words, 'Yesterday I was not here, to-morrow I shall be far away. But to-day is ours. . . .' And the lovely girl held out a flower to him. . . . I shall be in Moscow for a very short time, but during this brief period I suggest living together. . . . I am not free, Ariane Nicolaevna. . . . One day I shall go and shall not return. Life is a tedious enough business. One needs ingenuity, will, power and a knowledge of the world to drag from it a few hours, I will not say of happiness, but at least of pleasure. Will you join me in a precarious alliance in pursuit of this precious pleasure? . . . I feel that I can talk to you like this, and that you will perhaps appreciate the unusualness and audacity of a proposal which I would not dare address in this form to any other but you. But you are without hypocrisy, and you look things in the face, I am convinced. . . . What risks shall we run? None, if you understand my meaning. . . . Oh, forgive me, I forgot one grave danger. . . . Perhaps you might fall in love with me. Perhaps I should lose my head over you. Love, which stands outside our convention, might intrude itself in spite of us. But are we going to shrink before this imaginary peril? You have courage and I do not lack it. I run towards the enemy. . . ."

He seized the girl in his arms. She did not resist, and,

leaning over her, he said, "Forgive me, Ariane Nicolaevna, but at this moment falsehood is hateful to me. Whatever happens, we shall not have deluded ourselves."

She was about to reply, but he closed her mouth with a kiss, and added:

"Say nothing, I implore you."

She withdrew, shook herself; took from her blouse a purple carnation and put it on her lips; then carelessly threw it to a corner of the room.

"Ages ago," she said, "I listened to people who wanted to reach the same end as you. They set about it differently. . . . At every age one learns. But it is late and this evening's lesson has gone far enough. I am going home. . . . By the way, did I tell you that the uncle at whose house I live is in love with me? I am obliged to bolt my door and—it's absurd—I suffocate in a room with the door shut."

They drove away. As he left Ariane Nicolaevna, he said to her:

"Till to-morrow. Will you dine with me?"

"No, I dine at seven o'clock."

"Very well, I will wait for you at your door at half-past eight, and you will do me the kindness of drinking tea at my flat."

"I swear I won't!"

3. *A Commonplace Affair*

AT HALF-PAST EIGHT ON THE FOLLOWING EVENING, ARIANE appeared at the door of her house, where Constantin awaited her. She was wearing an intoxicating hat with a wide brim fastened under her chin by ribbons. Her neck emerged bare from the long coat.

They went down the Tverskaya. It was understood that they were going for a walk. Nevertheless, on reaching the Hotel National, Constantin proposed that they should go in.

"Why not?" she said.

And beneath the heavy cloak, one thin shoulder shrugged lightly rippling the heavy cloth.

In the sitting-room, Ariane dropped her cloak, and then, going into the bedroom, took off her hat and arranged her hair before the mirror. She looked round her displaying no shyness. On the bed already turned down for the night Constantin's pyjamas were laid out.

They drank tea in the sitting-room. Constantin took the girl on to his knees and their lips met. At this point Ariane offered a strenuous resistance, and her sharp nails took no small part in the encounter. Constantin was at the last pitch of nervous strain. Civilisation has taught woman to oppose no more than a simulacrum of resistance at these moments to the man's attack, just enough to permit him the ancient gesture of conquest. It is a charming comedy in which the scenes have been long since static. But here, contrary to the conventions tacitly agreed with Ariane, he was forced to fight and to put forth his strength. Why should she defend herself so fiercely when she had decided to surrender? Why had she struggled for an hour without cessation? During a short armistice, he could not prevent himself from saying with a touch of brutality:

"Come, after all you know what we are here for. You are warned. Besides, it is not the first time. . . ."

Ariane looked at him with the air of a goddess and said in a tone which made Constantin feel the absurdity of his remark:

"You don't imagine that I've been waiting for you, do you?"

But as he tried to carry the girl into the bedroom, she clung to the divan and said in a clear voice:

"Only on conditions."

"I accept them in advance," answered Constantin exasperated.

"There is to be no light and I shall lie like a corpse."

"Now what kind of devil have I stumbled on?" thought Constantin Michel. "Here I've thrown myself into an affair with one of these modern girls who make love as

they eat, without either senses or appetite! They are equally indifferent to both. If only I don't come to regret it. . . ."

He held the cool body of the girl in his arms and answered:

"Your terms are ridiculous. . . . But this isn't the time to argue over them. . . ."

In the room where Ariane was playing dead he was aware by an obvious though involuntary sign that at least the first of the two suspicions which had crossed his mind was ill-founded. But in the meantime the fight went on in the dark, a fight against the corpse.

Irritated, he said sharply:

"There are times when it is right to fight and times when one ought to know enough to surrender."

"But I'm not fighting any more," murmured a voice in his ear, a little humble, childish voice, in which a breath of fear seemed to flutter and in which a new note struck him.

And at that instant he conquered her.

An hour later she sat before the dressing table, putting up her long abundant hair. It fell below her waist, and its airy waves concealed the slender trunk.

She was talking in a detached, unselfconscious way, telling stories of her past. By neither word nor look did she make any allusion to the novelty of the relations which had just been established between them. She rose as midnight struck. In vain he begged her to let him take her to supper.

"My sweetheart is waiting for me at home," she replied. "He picked a quarrel with me last night. It seems he guessed where I had come from. My aunt heard him. Scene number two. I want to avoid that; I prefer peace in the home."

They walked home. She chattered with a rich vivacity of ideas, of her school and of the education of the girls. When Constantin left her on her doorstep, she appeared surprised to hear him asking to see her again at the same hour on the following day. Without argument she accepted.

4. *Surgit Amari Aliquid*

THEIR LIFE TOOK ON A CERTAIN REGULARITY. CONSTANTIN never saw Ariane during the day, which she spent at the University. He went about his business, which was important. Once he lunched with the Baroness Korting, his nominal mistress and the prettiest woman in Moscow, who chose to be astonished at his lack of warmth. He had to use all his ingenuity in making his excuses.

But every evening at half past eight he met Ariane once more on the Sadovaya, his student in her coat; every evening they walked down to the Hotel National; when midnight struck, they retraced their path in the opposite direction, talking together with mutual happiness as they walked.

On every subject she had clear-cut opinions, which she put forward in a tone of certainty which brooked no contradiction; she erected systems of extreme materialism, leaving no place for sentiment, jeering relentlessly at pity and love. Occasionally he amused himself by tumbling down the wonderful castles she had built so nimbly in the air, but more often he let her give free play to her fancy. And he never ceased admiring the balanced workings of her brain, the clear gushing force of her thought. Constantin Michel knew the world—London, New York, Rome, Paris. "With a touch of polish," he thought, "with that elegance of style which can only be learned in the west, with the accent and vocabulary of good society over there, is there a single one of the capitals of the universe in which after a short trial and the indispensable limelight, this little Russian girl would not triumph? Delicate minds would rejoice in her."

He had indeed found an attractive companion here. She excited him into using his mind, and held him in a fever of continually fresh ideas and sensations.

He felt in her the inexhaustible wealth of the Russian spirit, that largesse, that generosity, that plundering of self that she allowed. "This girl needs only a method, or else the companionship of an exceptional man, to reach the highest peaks. But it must be admitted," he concluded, "that the men here are not equal to their task."

Every day Constantin Michel would impatiently await the moment which brought Ariane back to him. He drew comparisons between her and Baroness Korting who swept him with her beauty, who was good, kind and easy, but who, from having lived too long in the west, had acquired the artificiality which rules the drawing-rooms of France and England. He had nothing to reproach her with—save the greatest reproach of all: in her company he was bored.

With Ariane, boredom was unknown. Even the idea of it was not to be thought of, so protean was she, so amusing, so gay. so serious, so contradictory, so fantastic, so difficult, so shy, so girt about by her self-sufficiency as if by an impregnable fortress.

It was a lucky evening when he had her to dinner. A supper took on all the radiance of a party. The long walk between the Sadovaya and the National was far too short for them. They lingered to talk far into the night and on the doorstep still prolonged the conversation.

But it was a different Ariane who appeared in the suite of the Hotel National. There he found a woman who was a stranger to him. From the day he had first held her in his arms, he had expected that the mutual relationship between lover and mistress would be established. Now he recognised his mistake. He thought that he had conquered her, yet each time his victory was once more called in question. He felt he had made no progress. His mistress was his only by a fiction. In reality she was not to be had. He kissed her: she let herself be kissed and enjoyed it, but she never came to him of herself with a spontaneous movement of affection.

One day he commented to her on it. The answer he got froze him:

"Do not take any notice of that," she had said; "I am always like that. . . ."

"Detestable education," thought Constantin. "What idiots has she known before me?"

Each meeting between them was a battle between the warmth of the man and the coldness of the woman. But he felt the coldness was calculated, ordered by an effort of will and it annoyed him. He never exercised any compulsion to bring Ariane to his rooms. She came of her own free choice; but from the moment she came, she seemed to die within herself. . . . She remained silent, her eyes wide. The best he could get from her during the first week of their liaison, when he whispered in her ear the eternal phrases that lovers have ever said to the woman they hold in their arms, was a half-muttered *nitchevo*.

The battle excited Constantin Michel and he swore to himself to emerge from it victorious. Nevertheless, he was wounded to the heart by the attitude from which Ariane never weakened.

But these were as yet no more than preliminary skirmishes.

On the fourth or fifth evening, as he was smoking a cigarette seated on the foot of the bed, he uttered without thinking two of those banal questions that rise to a man's lips when his mistress leaves his arms.

She did not answer. He repeated the remark.

Without raising her head towards him, she said indifferently as if she was not aware of the poison in her answer:

"I am waiting for the third question, the one that every man has put to me after the two you have just asked. . . ."

Constantin Michel grew white. He had the strength to control himself and not to utter a word more. He finished his cigarette, went into the bathroom, and stayed there longer than customary. When he came out, midnight had struck.

"Come," he said.

She came close to him, leaned against his shoulder, and asked:

"What is the trouble? You look sad. I am not the cause?"

"Nothing, little one, nothing; you are as delightful as ever."

On their way they argued a point of philosophy, each defending his position with violence, almost bitterness. In the end Constantin Michel burst into a shout of laughter.

"Where the devil will we not find things to quarrel over?"

And he kissed Ariane, who was still defending herself.

On the following evening the fight began again, but in more subtle fashion.

Constantin conceived the somewhat vain curiosity of discovering why Ariane Nicolaevna, who could make her choice, had pitched on him, Constantin Michel, and had surrendered herself without more ado at the third meeting. He did not imagine himself irresistible. On the other hand, whatever may be the freedom a girl may allow herself, it is difficult to suggest that she goes to the length of picking a lover, as a man a mistress, and often for an hour only. Ariane had no love for him. Why was she there at his side?

He talked of the historic evening of *Boris Godounov*, and returned to his first impression of her, the long hesitation between "young woman" and "child."

"And you," he said, "what did you think of me, for after all the first impression determines all the rest?"

"Oh!" she replied, "I said to myself, 'He is my kind,' for I must tell you that in my experience, it is only fair men who have any temperament. Dark men make a show of it, but it is only smoke. One grasps them; there is nothing in one's hand. . . . After several unlucky experiments it is wisdom to return to what one has proved good."

She chattered as pleasantly as if she were talking of the sun or the rain on this May day.

Constantin felt as if he had swallowed some bitter drug. He felt that the only retort to a provocation of this nature was a whirl of blows. He restrained himself; he must win the battle with other weapons. He took out a cigarette, lit it and with a kindly natural smile, scolded her affectionately.

"Ariane, Ariane, there are things one thinks of but never mentions. You are simply a little cossack."

"Oh," she exclaimed in a tone of complete sincerity, "I hate lying; it is too difficult, so I say things as they come to me. You must have noticed it yourself. . . . Confess; I am without cleverness and without guile. My behaviour with you has shown you that. Would you hold it against me?"

He had not the strength to catch her in his arms and kiss her on the lips, as it would have been politic to do at the moment. There still remained in his mouth an after-taste of bitterness which could not disappear so quickly. He limited himself to some warm commonplace protestations.

"At bottom," he said, "I like you because you are yourself. That may well bring with it some inconveniences, but the advantages carry the day. Of course, you say, quite simply, things that a western woman would kill herself before she would breathe. Must it not, however, be recognised then that, the first shock of astonishment over, this somewhat rough frankness has its value? Perhaps, perversely, I may end by finding charm in it."

But the same evening, as he walked home from the Sadovaya at one in the morning, Constantin clenched his hands and breathed his wrath. He felt attacked, flouted by this girl who, under a show of not touching him, had wounded him in a sensitive place, fed each day the wound she had opened and with cunning skill poisoned it. For after all, however fond one may be of frankness, love, even physical love, must cover itself with some illusions. By brutally unveiling it and on that particular side, one puts it to flight. It is necessary to banish the idea that in the arms of a woman one meets the shades, more or less effaced, of one's predecessors. There are things of which one never thinks if one's mind is healthy, even less, perhaps, if one is not hopelessly in love. However, Constantin Michel was held to Ariane and in more ways than one; she had the savour of a delicious early fruit already ripe, of which the occasional acidity turned the teeth. But of love there

was no question. So it was easy for him to forget Ariane's past.

Yet this fiend of a girl pushed it continually before his eyes and forced him to look it in the face. At first he had believed she did so out of clumsiness, by that lack of instinct which, curiously, so often affects the minds of even the most intelligent women. There was possibly a gap in her education; Aunt Varvara who so freely revealed herself to her niece must be responsible for it; and then, the society of provincial Russia . . . It would be sufficient to warn Ariane Nicolaevna.

But Constantin soon recognised his mistake. It was not by chance that she spoke thus. He divined in her a deliberate plan, a well considered offensive and one which would prolong itself. A sure instinct warned him that Ariane knew the place to wound him and that she was keeping her grip on it.

Yet it was impossible to let her continue this for fear he might be poisoned.

At this point in his reflections, Constantin Michel made a complete reversal of his ideas. "After all," he told himself, "why am I worrying myself? Every night I hold a delightful, fresh girl in my arms, the sharer of conversations more amusing than I have ever heard. In a month or six weeks I shall have left Russia; we shall never see each other again in this life. Let us let things run their course."

So he talked, but it was only words, for deep inside him there lurked that flavour of bitterness which the poison brewed by Ariane Nicolaevna had deposited. As he went on amusing himself by trying to see clearly, he said to himself, "Why is it that I attach so much importance to this girl's past life? Am I, perhaps, more attached to her than I think? That would be a nice bit of lunacy! To fall in love with a girl, young but with a thick past, who tumbled into my arms without offering the slightest resistance, good Lord! as she would have fallen into those of her neighbour if I had not been there! She has a wealth of youth and intelligence, but she has one fault which in the long run makes her intolerable to me; she is spiteful. She wants, and she already knows how, to make me suffer. But

still, she can employ this detestable skill only so far as I will let her. I am free; the day on which I tire of her, I shall be off. For the moment, it is only the desire to conquer the coldness she affects that hold me to her. That and nothing more."

He turned to dreaming of the near future. Where would he be in a month? In Constantinople, or in New York, in any case far away from Ariane Nicolaevna. He had work to do. And then, wherever he went, he would meet other women. Life is not to be reckoned. How ridiculous to think of imprisoning himself within the black overcoat of a little student of Moscow University.

Constantin Michel had walked quickly. He reached the Hotel National in a good temper and before going to his rooms supped lightly. When he entered his bedroom, there lingered still a faint but penetrating scent, the same he had breathed some hours before on the nape of Ariane Nicolaevna's neck. The bed was unmade. An irresistible desire seized him to fold Ariane in his arms, to speak to her harshly, to tell her that he was the master, that he would bear with no more insolence, then to take her, . . . and then, too, perhaps, he might hear once more that voice, that humble child's voice which had never echoed in his ear but once, but which he could not forget and which he sought to find once more in Ariane's mouth; which, without admitting it to himself, he expected each day like a promised miracle; the voice which had said that first night, "But I'm not fighting any more."

Constantin Michel stayed seated on the bed. Suddenly he started.

"Oh! I am going mad. . . . I am going to show you whether I am free, little Ariane from nowhere."

He hurried to the telephone, and asked for the Baroness Korting's number. In spite of the lateness of the hour, she was not yet in bed. Constantin Michel informed that charming woman that at last he had a little leisure and begged her to dine with him on the following night. Baroness Korting did not conceal the pleasure with which she accepted the invitation.

On the following day, about eight o'clock, when Ariane

was at home, he rang her up, told her that he had a business dinner impossible to put off, that he was distressed not to see her, but that he counted on her as usual on the following night.

She answered simply:

"All right; till to-morrow," and hung up the receiver.

5. *Baroness Korting*

AN HOUR LATER HE WAS DINING WITH BARONESS KORTING, whom he had known for several years. She was one of those women with whom a man is flattered to be seen, for she was beautiful with the beauty that one accepts and which makes people in the streets, even the lowest, turn round. She was kindly. Constantin had never heard her say a spiteful thing of anyone. She did not lack subtlety in matters of love, wherein the simplest woman is more understanding and sees clearer than man. Lastly, she put Constantin Michel on a pedestal and declared to whomever would listen, that he was "incomparable."

Moreover, Constantin had remained attached to her. She seemed to be the one fixed point in the wandering existence he led. Thus it happened that he spent a winter month with her at Nice; on another occasion, a party in Paris in spring, and lastly, he had again twice found her in Moscow when he had come there on business.

He wanted to take her to a restaurant, but on the telephone she begged him to dine at her house. He was delighted to find a well-furnished mansion, an elegant and elaborate table, and his eyes looked with admiration at the Baroness Korting, clad in her smart Rue de la Paix gown. She received him splendidly, spoiled him, petted him, surrounded him with a thousand attentions, burned before him the incense with which she usually surrounded her god. She asked him for the latest stories of London and Paris; for his benefit she related the more recent scandals

of Petersburg and Moscow. Where was he? Everywhere and nowhere, and no more in Russia than anywhere else. The maître d'hotel himself was Italian and Baroness Korting shone with the veneer of the west. Why was he thinking, at the very moment he put the question to himself, of the pale little girl of the Sadovaya? She was truly of her own country, despite her European culture. He banished his thoughts.

Baroness Korting, whom her intimates called Olga, brought him back to himself by asking what he did with his evenings. He was seen nowhere. He pleaded conferences with business people whose days were occupied. With feminine logic Olga said to him:

"Well, then, arrange to have tea with me. You know I shall always be free at any hour which suits you."

He stayed very late with this pleasant woman and the sky was growing light in the east when he passed along the empty streets to regain his hotel. His nerves were quiet and his mind at peace. "All the same," he told himself, "that is wisdom and security, the *otium cum dignitate* of the Latins, for, say what you will, I am at the mercy of any caprice of this changeable girl. I possess everything and yet I look for something else. It is absurd. I am going to put the Sadovaya story into liquidation. I have a journey to make to Kiev which falls in the most providential way to cut short this episode; for at bottom, it is nothing but that. And I am going to hurry on my departure."

Towards seven in the evening, Constantin Michel was surprised to find himself not a little nervous that Ariane might countermand their appointment by telephone. He was certain she would do it solely by way of reprisal and to avenge herself for her abandonment of the previous evening. But he got nothing by his nervousness. Ariane did not ring up, and at half-past eight she appeared with the punctuality customary to her, framed in the doorway in the Sadovaya.

He was struck by her slightness, by her delicacy, the fragility of her whole person. Only on the forehead and in the eyes could strength be read. Then suddenly he was

seized by a new feeling towards her, quite foreign to him, the feeling of pity. He felt that she was a little girl thrown alone into the dangerous whirlwinds of life. She would be pounded by them as were many as good as she, who went forward full of courage with an air of defiance, their heads high, towards the storm. And now at the turning in the road, she had collided with a hard rock, himself, Constantin Michel. He had a fleeting vision of the future. "This tale will have a bad ending for you, my child," he thought. In spite of yourself, you will grow fond of me, and one fine day I shall be off to New York or Shanghai, leaving you alone, lost in the midst of this human sea, which is Russia."

He had a moment of unutterable emotion. He forgave Ariane his past troubles. She, too, young as she was, had had an ideal and not having attained it, she made those she met pay for her mistakes.

He passed an arm through the girl's, pressed it against his own and led her to the hotel. Throughout the evening he was all kindness and gaiety. Her lover's mood did not escape Ariane. She let herself be carried by the invincible current of affection which poured from the heart of Constantin Michel. For the first time, she forgot her rôle, pressed herself against him, cuddled into his arms, and told him the wildest tales of her childhood in which there was nothing to hurt him.

This was a brief lull. A few days later the implacable underground battle was resumed. One evening when Ariane was unwell, she began talking of their relationship. She thanked him for having defined its character with so much precision and foresight, even before it began.

"There I can clearly see," she said, "my friend, at once wise and forewarned in everything. Thanks to you, everything between us is plain. There remains no place for any ambiguity. We have formed a temporary alliance in the pursuit of pleasure. I will not conceal from you that you have known how to give it to me."

"That is much," Constantin broke in. "You know de Vigny's lines?

'Tis pleasure that she loves:
Man is but rude; he takes it but knows not
The way to give it.'"

"I don't know the words," she rejoined, "but as they say, I believe I know the tune," (Constantin Michel bitterly regretted his quotation). "And then our talks are more than a slender bond in this business. Ordinarily men are just silly. As soon as one has got what one wants of them, they become speechless."

Within himself Constantin began to grimace. But how to stop Ariane? He tried to turn the conversation. With a superior logic, Ariane came back to it.

"But since we are free, we have the right to do what pleases us. You can have a mistress," ("Good; she knows all about me," thought Constantin.) "and I can take a lover. That would be treachery, since we do not love each other and we have given each other previous warning."

"Oh, upon my soul, no! No sharing for me!" cried Constantin who on this ground saw the chance of airing his views. "No, a hundred times, no. As long as you are mine, you are no one else's. You can consider that settled."

"All the same, if I had a lover you would not know it."

"That is where you make your mistake. I should know it— and at once."

"Well, then?"

"My dear child, to my keen regret, all would be over between us." He uttered these words without anger but with a decision of tone which seemed to impress Ariane.

A little later she returned obliquely to the question which occupied him.

"Yet for all that you do not love me?"

"That is another question," Constantin rejoined, "but for the time you belong to me, I yield you to no one."

"How queer you are," Ariane exclaimed.

"I am what I am, and there is nothing to discuss. Things are clear on this point. Now let us change the subject."

With an apparent indifference, they began to talk on some commonplace theme.

But as she rose to go, Constantin was caught by a sud-

den gust of emotion. He stood Ariane against the wall, put his hands on her shoulders, and, looking deep into her eyes, said:

"I do not know what game you are playing in this business, little girl. If you want to fight, well, let us fight. But I warn you that you will not beat me. Of us two, it is I who will win, be very sure. And would you like me to tell you what will happen to you? Whether you will or not, you will love me. You will love me with your diabolical head, with your heart of which I know nothing, and with your body with which I am acquainted."

Beneath his hand he felt Ariane's left shoulder trying to shrug. He held it firmly and the attempted gesture came to nothing.

6. *Unforeseen Movement*

In the meantime Constantin was seeing Baroness Korting three or four afternoons during the week, and Ariane every evening. If he was making progress with the girl, there was no evidence of it. Already they were verging on mid-May. Ariane was always Ariane. One day she would be gay, girlish, bubbling with anecdotes and charming phrases. On the next, with an art incomparable in its studied negligence, she would return to the hated themes with seeming enjoyment.

"You do not tell enough lies," remarked Constantin laughing. "You have not yet understood the secret of happiness which lies in a carefully nourished and respected illusion."

"There is more than one way of being happy," she replied. "Who knows if mine is not as good as yours? Why should I complain of life," she added, "when I have a good-looking and intelligent lover?"

"Ariane, I do not like having fun made of me."

"But still, since I chose you from among so many others without giving myself time to reflect, it must be your phy-

sical appearance, your physical appearance and nothing else, sir, that has something irresistible about it. For in truth, the undergraduate who escorted me to the theatre is quite attractive. But you are better since I am here at this moment and not in his arms . . . Poor boy! He had been paying me the most assiduous, the most respectful court for three months. He really thought the prize was in his hand. That evening at the Grand Theatre was going to be decisive. Think! he had ordered a motor-car! We were going to sup at Yar's . . ."

Constantin Michel had taken tight hold of his nerves. To punish himself, like a flagellant who still desires to be beaten, he asked:

"Well, what would have happened?"

"What always happens in these cases, dearest and best of friends. We should have supped and drunk champagne. Then we should have come back in the car . . ."

"And then?" asked Constantin in a cold voice. "Has he a flat? Decent hotels do not take in people in the middle of the night."

"There are still the hotels which are not decent," the girl replied. "Besides, from the Petrovski Park to the middle of Moscow takes twenty minutes. And one can lengthen the road. A closed car, the joltings of the road, the intoxication of supper, an arm slid round my waist, hungry lips on my neck . . . Well, I am not made of wood," she ended, "and you know it better than anyone . . ."

The following day, Constantin decided on his departure for Kiev and broke the news to Baroness Korting in the afternoon. In the evening he told Ariane. She started.

"Oh, you are going away on my birthday! That is not kind!"

It was the first time she had displayed any feelings in his direction.

He took her in his arms.

"You ought to have told me, little girl," he said. "How could I know? In any case, we will dine together tomorrow. I do not go away until eleven o'clock and only for a week. By the way, how old are you, then?"

"Eighteen, of course."

"What! eighteen? You have let me believe that you were at least twenty."

He seemed to think that she had deceived him on a point of capital importance.

"Eighteen," he repeated, "eighteen! It is unimaginable! It can't be eighteen! . . . So, when I met you you were only seventeen. You ought to have told me! you really ought to have told me."

He was at the pitch of exasperation.

She calmed him.

"I do not see what our ages have to do with this episode. I did not ask for yours. The day we met—oh, blessed day!" she interjected ironically—"I was a month short of eighteen. What is a month? . . . You are not going to quarrel with me over a month?"

But Constantin would not compose himself, and what he referred to as a "new fact" led to an almost immediate consequence as unexpected by him as by his mistress.

Ariane was telling stories of her aunt Varvara. She stressed the wisdom of her life, her perfect balance, the art by which Varvara Petrovna had known how to pluck none save the roses of love.

"Aunt Varvara told me," she went on, "that marriage is neither love nor pleasure . . ."

"With all her experience," interrupted Constantin, "your aunt did not know very much of life. Free as she may be, she is a woman with a system, and after what you have just told me, I have a pretty poor opinion of her. Between people who love each other, little girl, there is no question of times and seasons; they leave each other neither night nor day, lunch and dine at the same table, go to sleep together and wake beside each other. Do you like it yourself when we are so close to each other that nothing stands between us, when you feel me next to you, when we seem to live the same life and the beating of your heart mingles with the beating of mine, do you like to tear yourself away from me, to get up, to go away? Do you not feel the wall which at once rises between us? You turn

again into a stranger, you become once more the enemy."

Constantin had grown unusually warm and was surprised at himself. Ariane clapped her hands and mocked him.

"How eloquent you are getting!"

"It was your aunt's idiocies which infuriated me," Constantin Michel replied. "They have nothing to do either with you or myself. The devil take her! What ideas has she been able to stuff your head with?"

He strode up and down the room. Ariane was silent.

Suddenly he halted in front of her.

"Do you know what we will do? When do you take your last examination?"

She mentioned a date a week ahead.

"Good," he went on; "I shall be back from Kiev. You will have finished with the University. You need some fresh air. I too want a rest. I have been working hard. And besides, Moscow gets curiously on my nerves. I will take you down to the Crimea; we will spend a fortnight in the southern sun, among the flowers and under the trees. We will live like gods; we will not think, we will not argue. That is my *ne varietur* plan. You have only to obey."

He had scarcely finished than he stood dumbfounded at what he had said. Into what adventure was he throwing himself and that at the very moment when he had decided to break with his mistress? Certainly, in the provoking company of Ariane he was losing his reason.

Meanwhile, in a calm voice, she was raising objections. Her aunt was expecting her on the day she finished her examinations at Moscow. She received three or four letters a week imploring her not to lose an hour. The liaison between Varvara and the handsome doctor might be transforming itself into a tragedy. Ariane's presence was necessary there. Friends, too, who had their rights, counted on her presence. Finally, one reason, which she alluded to while still leaving it obscure, forced her to go home on the day fixed.

The more she talked, the more firmly Constantin convinced himself of the excellence of his plan. He finished

the argument by proclaiming with a calm assurance, the force of which he had found greatly to influence the girl:

"I want to go to the Crimea with you. This is my beginning and my end. Therefore, so it shall be. You will never make me believe that an ingenious girl like yourself cannot steal a fortnight which we need. I leave the arrangement to you and reserve myself for giving you advice. To-day is the 18th. I return from Kiev on the 28th. You will have finished your examination the same day, and on the 29th we will take the Sebastópol express. You shall have your liberty again between the 15th and 20th of June."

This said, he refused further to discuss the matter beyond that point, and on the morrow he stood with Ariane on the platform of the station for Kiev, for she had not refused to accompany him. For the first time during the six weeks he had known her, he had prevailed on her to accept a present in honor of her eighteen years and a watch bracelet encircled the girl's wrist.

"Get your luggage ready for the 29th," he said.

"But it is impossible, I assure you."

The bell rang. He took Ariane in his arms. It seemed to him that she had never clung to him with so eager a gesture, that she had never surrendered herself so completely as in this rapid kiss on the platform of the station.

He pondered over it long in the train. "Am I making a mistake?" he asked himself. "Is it illusion? . . . No, no; it is the truth. This girl, so circumspect, has this time betrayed herself."

7. The Crimea

A WEEK LATER, CONSTANTIN MICHEL WAS RETURNING from Kiev. Every evening from five to seven, the day over, he had waited the fall of night on the terrace of the Merchant's Garden. The view enjoyed from there is one of

the loveliest in the whole world. On the left, beneath the terrace, lie the populous quarters of the port; to the right, in the green, the white walls and gilded cupolas of the holiest shrine in Russia. Then the sluggish Dnieper with its sweeping curves, furrowed by steam boats, the trains of barges and lighters, the climbing smoke, the shrieks of whistle and siren across the water; and further off, the Russian plain receding without a break towards the horizon and the huge dark stain of the forest to the east. It is a vast landscape, animated in the foreground and tranquil in its distances. With nothing of the picturesque, it is a landscape of which one never tires and which changes slowly beneath the varied play of the light. The air was soft after days already warm, the sky deep, and flowers scented the peaceful twilights. Constantin Michel would gaze at the bright dresses of the women, the officers' uniforms, the eddying crowd upon the terraces, then he would turn his eyes towards the plain which slumbered beneath him. In this grandiose setting, the Moscow episode came back to its right proportions. He was astonished at having been so impassioned. He still did not understand why Ariane's past was capable of moving him to such an extent. "Thank God," he said to himself, "she has not deceived me. Had she possessed the trickiness of her western sisters, had she played with me the ingenious sentimental comedy to which we all lend ourselves so complacently, had she tried to make me believe she loved me and that, in spite of the numerous experiences in her past, I was the first man who had entered her heart, who knows if I should not have let myself be caught? But with her it is impossible to cherish these illusions, which carry us so far. I have never met anyone so matter of fact. She displays herself like an anatomical chart. The very things most women hide, she flaunts before one. I shall know by the time I come back from the Crimea the exact number of lovers she has had. I am a number on a list, let us not forget that. I ought to thank this delightful girl for having made me so free a gift of herself and for having spared us both long hesitation and dubious subterfuge."

In this mood, he wrote her a gay letter confessing in lively terms that he could not do without their conversations with which she had contrived to beguile his stay in Moscow and promising himself a thousand pleasures during the weeks to come in the Crimea. He had a line from her which crossed his; she made no mention of their projected journey and described in witty terms her life between an amorous uncle and an aunt whom jealousy barely succeeded in rousing from her habitual indolence. Her letter displayed the nimble off-hand charm she brought to everything.

He telegraphed the time of his arrival and confirmed their departure for the following day.

Ariane Nicolaevna was waiting for him on the station platform and in the carriage which bore them to the hotel, pressed herself affectionately against him. She had that day passed her last examination in the most brilliant fashion. She raised no difficulties in the way of their journey to the Crimea and recounted the ingenious method by which, with the complicity of a fellow student, she was deceiving her father, her uncle, her aunt Varvara and the numerous friends who were expecting her in the country. She only insisted that she must be home on the 10th of June for reasons of the weightiest character, and that on this point there could be no argument. She had therefore a week of freedom.

On the following day, the Sebastópol express bore them away.

They were alone, stretched on a little beach of warm, tanned sand at the edge of the sea. To the right, to the left and close behind them were red, jagged rocks. At their feet lazy waves came to die with the sound of cloth being torn. In the limpid sky hung a few little clouds burdened with light, motionless as if nailed to the blue. In this fashion, as Constantin Michel had promised, they lived like gods, and at the waters' edge, beneath the sun which bathed their bodies, they silently breathed in the sea air. They had been in the neighbourhood of Yalta for more

than a week, in intimacy every minute. They lived in a house which a painter friend of Constantin had lent him, a little white walled house, hidden among the rocks not far from the road which runs from Yalta to Alúshta. It consisted of two rooms only. The larger, used as sitting- and dining-room, looked southwards through three windows towards the sea and had rough-cast plaster walls on which a few oriental fabrics were hung. Divans covered with Persian rugs were arranged along the walls. The smaller, the bedroom, faced westward on to a curious landscape of cactus, thick plants, flowers, rocks, and pine trees. At the back of the villa lay the kitchen, where the maid prepared their meals. She was a girl of Tartar blood, with black hair and beautiful naked feet, which slid past quietly without the slightest sound.

Ariane had examined the habitation which Constantin had found for their joint existence, in the manner of a cat inspecting a new abode, then had disappeared into the kitchen where she held a long conversation with the Tartar. Constantin had entrusted to her the management of the household, not without qualms that the result might be too fantastic. He was mistaken. Ariane revealed herself as an accomplished mistress of a house. Not only were the meals served at the hour stated, but the provender was excellent and varied. Ariane was not above providing recipes for the Tartar—recipes stolen from the famous cook of Varvara Petrovna—and she also supervised their preparation. There was a certain *chaudfroid* of fish with caviare before which Constantin went into ecstasies and a *coulibiak* of which he talked for days. The girl took her new duties seriously and was delighted, at meals, to see Constantin doing justice to the fare.

Their life flowed on, monotonous but exquisite. They woke late in a bright room. Ariane clapped her hands. Then their barefoot Tartar appeared, smiling and silent, carrying a tray laden with chocolate, tea, cream, new bread, butter, jam and fruit. They breakfasted side by side with enormous appetites and lingered over their rising. About eleven, however, they went down to the little beach close

by. There in the full sunlight they disported themselves, playing like children among the rocks, plunged into the water, came out again to plunge in once more, then came to lie on the warm sand. They rested motionless beneath the burning sun, their eyelids closed. It felt like the tingling of millions of tiny electric shocks on their skin which spread in circles into the centre of their being. They nearly lost consciousness; they seemed one with the earth and universal life flowed in them. They were blood kin to the rocks, the sand and the flowers which surrounded them. The salty winds stroked their tanned healthy bodies. They did not speak; they scarcely felt alive.

About one o'clock, when the sun beat directly down on them, they went back like drunken men to the cool sitting-room and luncheon. Followed a long siesta during the hours of heat. On the first day Constantin stretched himself on a divan. Ariane rested on the bed. On the second day, to his great surprise, she called him. Reading, smoking, sleeping, they rested there close to each other, half clad. At five o'clock they drank their tea. At last they must dress. Ariane sighed but put up her hair and slid into a garment as light as a spider's web.

At dusk, they left their estate and walked up the Yalta road. Often they went as far as the town, some versts distant, crossing the rich orchards and the flower gardens which flanked the shore. When night had fallen, they supped on the terrace of a hotel overlooking the sea. Below them boats rocked in the harbour, lit up by huge electric globes. Distant music sped by on the scented air. People stared enviously at this couple whose happiness blazed like a challenge. Then they returned to their villa. All along the road, fire-flies stabbed the scented thickets with their fiery darts, flitting from branch to branch, went out to glow again further on, giving their nocturnal passage a backdrop wherein love at each pace flared in brief, living flames. At home, they found the samovar, and after undressing and kissing, they tarried, talking late into the night.

That external reserve which Ariane had always pre-

served, disappeared in the intimacy of their life together. Now she used the familiar 'thou' to her lover who had hinted that for a child of nature the 'you' lacked simplicity. In Constantin's arms she became a fond, passionate mistress, heaping caresses on him with something of abandon.

Still he felt that, within her, she had in no wise altered. She remained ironical, witty, with a freedom of mind which displayed the utmost parade of cynicism. The mere idea that there could be any question of love between them would have made her burst into an insolent and boyish laugh. Love is one of the blameless dreams of innocent girls. The wise look for the realities only in the physical, and the pleasure of sensuality has no need to complicate itself with a sentimental illness calculated to make the most intelligent of people stupid.

Ariane offered her thanks to her lover for having been clever enough to arrange in so marvellous a way an existence which satisfied the senses while leaving both heart and brain free.

During their first week by the seaside she had the delicacy not to refer to her earlier experiences. Every reference she made to love she took care to generalise. This cream of materialistic wisdom in Ariane contrasted strangely with the blooming youthfulness of her eighteen years, and Constantin Michel never ceased to be surprised at it.

Thus, one day pursuing another in a continuous passionate train, they came to the 10th of June, the date on which Ariane was to be home. Once only had Ariane alluded to the necessity of being punctual at a trysting place, beyond which she would offer no further explanation. In vain had Constantin, whose curiosity had been awakened and who believed he knew all about his mistress, tried to learn something more. She had answered in vague and purposely equivocal terms; it concerned a debt of honour on which she could not go back. From certain phrases, he gathered that a question of money was mixed up with it. Whenever she spoke of it, she became care-worn, irritable and finally begged Constantin to drop a subject which was painful to her. He held his tongue,

but felt that here was something obscure, to probe the mystery of which he would have given much. Ariane looked at the calendar more frequently and her mood altered.

One evening, as they were supping on the terrace of a Yalta hotel, she spoke of their approaching, and this time definite, separation.

"You will begin running about the world again and after women, and I, next autumn, shall resume my University studies in Moscow. I am thinking of going to Europe after the first six months, to Paris and London."

"Then we shall meet again over there," said Constantin happily. "You shall see what a lovely time I will arrange for you."

"I shall never see you again," she said, without raising her voice. "What is the good? Warmed-up dishes are tasteless. We have lived very pleasantly together. Let us leave it at that. Besides," she continued, flinging a charming smile at Constantin, "I have had the luck not to become attached to you. I ran big risks, for you are dangerous but I have been able to avoid them. Do you see me making myself fall in love with you? Do you want me to suffer by your absence?"

"Yes," answered Constantin simply. "I want it."

"Well, I do not want it. I have my youth to protect. Do not think that I will sacrifice it. You will have quickly forgotten me. A little girl as you call me, does not count for much in a long list. Thank God, everything has happened between us as arranged. We are not going to swallow a pill which would disagree with either of us. Confess you do not see me as the tearful lover. Is that a part for me? We will say good-bye forever in a few days . . ."

Annoyed, Constantin looked at Ariane. She was gay and expressed herself in a tone of detachment which wounded him to the quick.

For some time they continued to lacerate each other, smiling, impassable, each seeking the weak place in his adversary to thrust in a sharpened dart. People, enviously watching them, imagined they were exchanging the thou-

sand endearments customary between lovers. Constantin finished with these words:

"We are very close to one another. But between us there lies a gulf which nothing can fill. I give it up. . . . Let us go."

Ariane had a miserable smile at the corners of her lips. They rose and walked back to their house. The moon was playing on the waters and bathing the sleeping orchards of Yalta. But Ariane was silent and Constantin insensible to the beauty of the night.

They went to bed in silence. Suddenly as they were falling asleep, Ariane flung herself against her lover, took his face in her hands and covered it with kisses.

"Forgive me," she said very softly in his ear. "I have been naughty. I won't be so any more."

And Constantin found again the humble childish voice, which he had heard but once before, on the night when Ariane first gave herself to him.

8. *Separation*

TWO DAYS LATER, A TELEGRAM CAME. CONSTANTIN OPENED it and held it out to Ariane. He was urgently recalled to Moscow. Without hesitation, without consulting her, Ariane observed, he telegraphed to Sebastópol to reserve a compartment for the day after the next. Ariane uttered no word of regret. That evening she was merry and conversational as usual.

But the following morning she surprised Constantin by an unexpected phrase in which she said that she knew from past experience, that she could not have children. Her lover remarked that she might have warned him earlier.

"You never asked me," she said quietly.

And the following day they bade farewell to the house on the seashore and to the barefooted Tartar girl, who

loaded their car with flowers. That evening they caught the Moscow express. Thirty-six hours later they reached the city in the morning. Constantin had extracted from Ariane a promise to pass one more day and night with him before their separation. They went to the Hotel National.

Constantin dreaded these hours. He had to leave for New York on difficult business. At another time he might have hailed with joy the arrival of this telegram which, like the *deus ex machina* in an opera, would have put an end to a situation with no outlet. However charming your mistress may be, yet you must leave her. Fate provided the necessary rupture and came to Constantin's aid when he would have been hard put to it to find the strength needed to break away. Ariane had given him the flower of her youth and her mind. Could he be annoyed with her for an excess of frankness so rare among women? Was he to feel a grievance against her because she had not loved him as the others had? Would he be idiot enough to regret that he did not see her in tears when they separated? And yet this epicurean watched her during the last hours of their liaison with an emotion he did not try to hide from himself. Mingled with it too was the uneasiness of what would happen at the moment of departure, like the physical terror of an animal which is afraid of being beaten or more simply, of suffering.

They wandered over Moscow in the afternoon. Outwardly Ariane lived a day of her life completely similar to all others. That evening she was as affectionate and passionate with him as in the unforgettable hours in the Crimea.

But on the following morning, the dreaded attack opened suddenly in full force. As usual, she began in the tone of a casual conversation.

"Well," said Ariane suddenly, "to-morrow I shall be home. Oh, thou who so lovest to command, tell me how many days you ordain for me to remain faithful to you."

Constantin ran over to her, put his hand over her mouth and, supplicating, said: "I implore you, Ariane, by everything that links us, do not spoil our last moments. We are

going to separate. What life will do to us I know not. But for the moment do not say anything to hurt me. I cannot stand the idea that you will ever belong to anyone else. It is absurd I know, but there it is. . . . Respect, I beg you, these necessary illusions. Later, when I am gone, what cannot be avoided will happen. . . . I have no rights over you. But do not speak. . . . Time will come to our aid. Keep quiet, little girl; one must learn to keep silent. . . ."

And he covered her face with kisses, pressed her in his arms. But when he had relaxed his embrace, she went on again pitilessly.

"I have a lover waiting for me. I have not concealed it from you."

This time, he stood frozen; he did not seem to hear.

She went on in a low soft voice, a hundred leagues removed from the meaning of her words.

"I shall scarcely have got home before he summons me. . . . I am a fortnight late for our agreed tryst. How shall I refuse myself to him? On what pretext? Let us say that I gain a few days, a week of purification. But in the end you cannot ask more of me. . . . This man has rights over me, rights prior to yours. And then you know what life is like in our parts, how everything is easy, everything different from here. . . . Here, let us make a compromise. I promise you for a week I will live with what you call 'our dearest memories'. . . . But ask no more of me, for in the end what does this posthumous fidelity mean? . . ."

Constantin had fled, slamming the door, cursing and swearing all down the staircase. At lunch, during the afternoon, and until evening, when they stood on the platform at the Ryazan station, Ariane persisted in being aggressive and irritable.

"It seems," Constantin said to her, "that you want to make this separation easier for me. Then you do not want me to regret you?"

They kissed spiritlessly, as if accomplishing some drudgery.

Constantin stayed on the platform to see the heavy train go out. He felt oppressed; he needed calm.

"Still another chapter of my life finished," he said, "and not the least interesting. But it was time. . . ."

9. The Fine Summer

THE HOUSE OF VARVARA PETROVNA HAD REGAINED ITS ANIMATION with the arrival of Ariane. The doctor, Michel Ivanovitch, was there each day and often made arrangements to come both during the afternoon and the evening. He did not conceal the pleasure which he derived from meeting Ariane again, and Varvara Petrovna was not jealous. There was the same intimacy as formerly between Olga Dimitrievna and Ariane. Olga was the only person Ariane permitted, even distantly, as a confidante. She was therefore aware of the unlucky liaison with the famous actor of whom all the women in Russia were dreaming, and of the short but brilliant episode of Constantin Michel whom she christened the "Great Prince." The journey to the Crimea, although Ariane spoke of it in the tone of detachment she used for the recital of her amours, sounded to her like a gold and silk embroidered romance, such as one reads in eastern tales. Together they frequented the summer theatre and were often seen on the brilliant terraces of the Alexander Garden. They supped with their "company" as they called it, which was no less brilliant than the previous year. Olga Dimitrievna appeared even no longer to fear the engineer, Michel Bogdanov. During the period of Ariane's absence he had found the means of winning her. He had approached her because she was the only real friend of her whom he still called the "Queen of Sheba," and of whom he could not give up talking. By a thousand subtle ways, particularly by presents of which Olga was very appreciative, he bound her to him. He had convinced her that it was no fleeting caprice that he had for Ariane, that he had always treated her with the utmost respect and that it only depended on her to become on the

day she chose, Mme. Michel Bogdanova. In all her letters Olga lauded the virtues of the engineer, his generosity, the superiority of his intellect, and she congratulated Ariane Nicolaevna on having made his conquest. Moreover, Olga put no further obstacles in the way of the appointments the engineer begged of Ariane.

Strangely enough, the latter continued to call on him twice a week, but at dusk to avoid the possible resurrection of scandal like that of the previous year. She came to the small house in the suburbs often in the company of Olga Dimitrievna, whom she left at the door.

As soon as she had entered, Ariane unclasped her watch bracelet, the gift of Constantin Michel, and placed it well in view on a small table.

"It is exactly six o'clock," she would remark.

An hour later, without ever tarrying, she appeared at the front door and Olga Dimitrievna would quiz her on the strict account she kept, never adding a minute to the sixty she owed the engineer.

"Business is business," Ariane replied, "and where should one be exact if not in one's relations with one's bank?"

Varvara Petrovna watched her niece. She found her changed, more serious.

"There is something new about you," she said, "something indefinable. You are not in love, I hope."

Ariane burst out laughing—so silly did the suggestion seem.

"That is a sickness which does not attack people of my age, only of yours," she replied, bantering her aunt.

Nicolas Ivanov had left the town three months before. He had not been seen since winter; he had shut himself up on his estate. Then, he had removed to the Crimea, where, so he said, his mother's health demanded his presence. But it was certain that his nerves had given way and he was himself undergoing treatment at the hands of the specialist who was attending Mme. Ivanova. Postcards addressed to Ariane reached her daily, which she threw away without reading.

She let herself be run after by a good-looking youth on whom she played a thousand tricks and made fun of cruelly.

Varvara Petrovna was not mistaken in noticing that her niece had changed. Ostensibly Ariane led a life similar to that of the previous year, but she no longer infused it with that spirit of mischief which had made her notorious in the town. Certainly she was still the most brilliant guest one could have to supper at the Alexander Garden. She had never spared anyone; but now her ridicule seemed more cruel; the sharp arrow she winged went deeper than before. Neither people nor theories could hold their ground before this mordant critic. Like Mephistopheles in Goethe's *Faust*, she might have said, "I am the spirit that denies." Otherwise she preferred to lie at home, dreaming, on the divan. She thought of Constantin Michel. He was different from the men who surrounded her, in the elegance of his bearing, and in a certain carelessness of manner which allowed him to do anything without falling into vulgarity. But it was due to other virtues that he owed the position he occupied in her thoughts and the high rank she conceded him. She felt a constant power in him which she could not control. With other men she toyed for a moment until, disgusted before she even tired of them, she let them fall back into the abyss.

It was otherwise with Constantin. It was not she who was amusing herself with him, but he with her. Of course, for brief instants, she succeeded in infuriating him; but he never lost his hateful nonchalance. And what did she gain? Was he more bound to her than to any young and pretty girl of whom he took his pleasure? He had taken her and left her at days and hours fixed by himself. She, ever punctual at the appointments at the Hotel National; he, insolent enough to cry off an evening at the last moment. Moreover, the next day she was in his arms again. . . . He had fled to Kiev alone, and taken and kept her in the Crimea to suit himself. But a telegram reached him and he departed without even consulting her; at Moscow he had not even granted her the one day of grace, which she

would not however have begged at the cost of her life. Olga Dimitrievna saw clearly; he was the Great Prince. He knew it; she had let him understand that she recognised his superior rights. He commanded; she obeyed. This last word in her own mouth made Ariane turn pale with wrath. "What must he think of me?" she muttered. "He treats me like a slave. Where is he at this moment? What woman is he winning with his infernal assurance? Oh, if I ever meet him again, he shall pay for the humiliation he has dared to inflict on me. I shall know the way to take my revenge."

Ariane had reached this point in her diagnosis, when one day she received a curt telegram. It was despatched from New York and read simply: *"Shall be in Moscow in a month. Till then. Constantin Michel. Plaza Hotel."*

"He has not even the politeness to add 'love' or 'kisses,'" she grumbled angrily. "Of course I will not see him again. What does he take me for? Does he think I wait upon him? Heaven help me if I answer this impudent cable."

The telegram had reached her about mid-day. In the evening she went out in the company of one of her friends. Never had she been more charming to this insignificant young man who in listening to Ariane and seeing the way in which she looked at him, did not doubt that he was at last to reach a long hoped for happiness. They strolled along the Dvoranskaya in the twilight.

On their way home as they passed a telegraph office, Ariane suddenly said:——

"Excuse me a moment."

She pushed open the door and entered the office. He followed her. Rapidly she scribbled Constantin's address in New York and beneath it a single word, "Hurrah." She left it unsigned, threw the telegram through the pigeon hole with some money and fled as if she were pursued.

10. *Recommencement*

In the early days of September, Ariane was back once more in Moscow. She had given up living with her uncle and aunt, and had taken lodgings in the modern flat of a worthy woman who let to her a well-furnished room to which she could invite her friends and hold those gatherings of young men and girls for which undergraduates of both sexes in Russia have so keen an appetite. They give themselves up to the delights of fruitless ideological discussions which last far into the night; as many ideas are exchanged as glasses of tea are drunk. Subtlety and generalisation are mixed in the most paradoxical fashion, and they dogmatise in inverse ratio to their experience of life. And all the time the men make love to the girls as is the habit of young people in every country and latitude.

Ariane had received no further news of Constantin Michel. When she had secured her rooms, she left her address and telephone number in a letter registered in Constantin's name at the hotel he frequented. But the weeks passed by. On one day of bad temper she tried to recover her letter. The porter refused to hand the correspondence of a well-known client to an unknown woman. "I shall be quits," she thought, "if I leave a message that I am away, when he asks for me."

Late one afternoon she was alone in the house when the ringing of the telephone was heard. She had a presentiment that the "Great Prince" as she nicknamed him after the manner of Olga Dimitrievna, was at the other end of the wire. She turned pale and decided not to reply, but of their own volition her legs took her over to the telephone. She took down the earpiece and said in a clear voice:

"Hello."

And without asking who was at the instrument, a masculine voice from the other end of the line called joyfully:——

"It is I! At last! I can't wait more than a minute for you! Take the best horse and give the driver a princely tip!"

She hung up the receiver, ran to the mirror, tidied her hair and was on the point of leaving the flat when she bethought herself. She ran back to her bedroom, rushed to the desk, opened a drawer and started hunting among the litter of papers that filled it for a dirty card, folded it up, slipped it into her bag and fled.

A quarter of an hour later, she knocked at Constantin's door. She had prepared a somewhat provoking greeting, but when she saw the Great Prince holding out his arms to her her tongue failed her and she was amazed to hear herself saying:

"Well, sir, you have managed to wait?"

They dined close beside each other in Constantin's rooms. He scarcely had the time to give her news of his business. Ariane did not listen to him. She was in the full flood of telling all about herself and of describing the splendid life she had spent that summer in her southern kingdom. She paraded her successive triumphs before the Great Prince's eyes. She was surprised to see, as soon as they had finished eating, Constantin get ready to go out, begging her to put her cloak on.

"We are going to your place," he said.

"You cannot come to my place and you never shall. What are you going to do there?"

"Little stupid," Constantin replied, "don't you know that I am going to keep you here? But at the hotel, with their lovely police regulations, you have to leave your passport. Let us go along and fetch it."

Ariane was embarrassed for a moment.

"By chance," she replied, "I have it on me."

She opened her bag and drew out the card she had taken from her drawer.

THREE months of separation had torn them apart and hurled them into civilisations so opposed that they might have been living on different planets. Whence had they come at the moment they at last found each other? In

Ariane's vivid descriptions, Constantin saw as with his own eyes the southern capital of which she was the queen; he knew those who had surrounded her down to their physical and moral peculiarities. But she herself remained impenetrable. What mysterious forces had pushed her here and there? Whom had she found again in this town he loathed? With what mien had she accosted her friends? With what new acquaintance was she entangled? He knew nothing. And Ariane on her side could not imagine in what atmosphere the Great Prince had lived. He had always been reticent of details of himself. Besides, she was not unaware of the look with which he glanced at women. Had she something more to learn?

They lay there stretched side by side, tired, at the edge of sleep. They were thinking with such intensity that it seemed to each of them that their thoughts formed of themselves and would become visible to the motionless adversary at their side. "Is it possible she does not know what I am thinking?" said Constantin to himself. And trembling, Ariane thought, "Heaven guard me from betraying myself, or from letting him read my heart."

At last they slept.

11. Life Together

THEIR LIFE, FOR WHICH THEY HAD MADE NO CONSCIOUS plan, ordered itself. During the day Ariane went to the University, Constantin about his business. He had taken an office in the centre of the city. They lived together, but Ariane retained her room; so she kept up appearances, had an address in Moscow, had her friends and her letters at home. At the hotel, Constantin had chosen a larger suite of three rooms. They still continued to share the same bedroom and Ariane on her own initiative had had one of the beds removed. The one that remained was not wide but, "I am thin," she said, "and I shall not incommode you." The

sitting-room served as a dressing-room for Constantin, the other bedroom was arranged as a dining-room.

They left each other late in the morning and met again at dinner, which they had most frequently at home. Sometimes, however, Ariane asked to go to a smart restaurant. There she refused to dine in a private room as Constantin would have preferred, for he was afraid of advertising and compromising her. Some of her relatives were in Moscow. She belonged to the enlightened bourgeoisie; she was still very young. Ought she not to consent to some sacrifice to keep her social position? But Ariane with a superb carelessness despised the scandal which might rise over her adventure. Never was there a person more indifferent to the opinions of others. She took her pleasure as she found it and left people to chatter. She was interested only in keeping up appearances to a small number of fellow students with whom she mixed. Thanks to the complicity of her landlady, for a long time no one of her circle suspected the double life she was leading, for undergraduates with lean purses do not frequent fashionable restaurants. On Friday evenings she had friends to see her. Constantin, who had little patience, had ordained that these weekly parties should come to an end early enough for Ariane to regain her hotel by one in the morning. He had imposed this condition with the clearness he brought to everything and to which Ariane, whatever might be her independence of character, dared offer no resistance. But in Russia, how can one dismiss friends who have come to one's house? Ariane laid these difficulties before the Great Prince. He replied that it was her business to find the method, that with her coming in at one, they would not be asleep before two or half-past, and that he was not going to change his habits for a few night prowling students. When she contested the point too sharply, he added with a touch of ill-humour, that his door would be closed at the hour laid down and that if she overstayed her time, she could always resort to sleeping at her own rooms.

Ariane listened to him in silence and reflected. Constantin's attitude surprised her. She considered detestable

the manner in which he pretended to treat her as a free agent and always to leave her the choice while at the same time exercising a boundless tyranny over her. She tried to console herself by the thought that Constantin was fonder of her than he would let appear. Why otherwise should he have insisted on her return at a certain hour? But why in the same breath, did he make her free to stay at her own rooms until morning? She rebelled in words, but in fact submitted and loathed herself for her cowardice. Each week she promised herself to prolong her party, to forget the time and to sleep one night at least in her own bedroom. But every Friday, well before midnight, she showed signs of restlessness and at every moment looked at the time shown on her watch bracelet, the present of the Great Prince. Supper was served at nine o'clock; she let the conversation drag, stopped the games and, well before midnight, found a thousand ingenious reasons for dismissing her guests.

She came home with her cheeks rosy with the cold, her eyes bright beneath her fur cap, her bearing free and easy, her air childish, full of amusing anecdotes and witty phrases. Youth entered the room with her where Constantin, stretched on the couch, dreamed or read, smoking cigarettes. They drank tea and talked. She told him of the evening she had just passed, and her stories of these Friday parties were always rich in events. Ariane's room became the centre of the most exciting episodes. The whole life of Moscow seemed to be concentrated in it. She sketched the principal actors in a few sentences and in unforgettable outlines, and told surprising tales while Constantin marvelled. "Would it not be wise," he sometimes told himself, "to stay in your room and to send this little girl running about the world to bring you back each evening the most coloured and most varied of pictures? The meanest thing, when seen through this child's eyes, lights up with beauty."

Little by little Ariane attended her lectures with less regularity. In the morning she lingered in bed. Now she rose about mid-day, dawdled over her dressing and was scarcely ready before half-past one. Then they must lunch.

The day was nearly over when they rose from table. She begged to accompany Constantin on his errands. She took him to the door where he had business. She refused to take a sleigh and danced around the Great Prince like a puppy beside its master. Sometimes she ran before him, played a thousand pranks in the street, stopped in front of shop windows, made faces at people, turned round to look after a handsome officer, talked to a student, then running to rejoin Constantin, hanging on her lover's arm and lifting her face close to his, bursting with laughter, made fun of the men and women they met.

"You look like Jupiter Olympus," she told him, "a Jupiter exiled in Scythia and obliged to clothe himself in furs. I would give anything to see the Master of the Gods slip on the snow and take a seat in the front row. Please, please, do me the kindness of coming down once full length in the middle of the Marshals' Bridge."

Constantin felt drawn forward by an impetuous current. During their early days, he had tried to bring Ariane to reason, to force her to go on with her University studies. Sometimes he reproached himself with having broken the girl's career. At other times, more thoughtful, he laughed away his fears. How could one enclose so rich a spirit between narrow borders? One day she would abruptly leave him without reason, just as she had taken him. She would play pranks or do things which society scarcely holds tolerable. Whatever might happen, she would be an inexhaustible fountain of life.

12. Semper Eadem

In the new setting of their life together, although the bonds of flesh and of the mind which linked them became each day imperceptibly stronger and more numerous, their sentimental attitude remained as it had been at the beginning of their liaison, and the latent drama between them developed and gathered a tragic intensity.

They persisted in proving to themselves that they were not in love, that between them stood nothing but an episode in which pleasure was the beginning and the end.

Ariane played variations on this theme with an unparalleled mastery. One day she broke into a dance of joy in the middle of the bedroom.

"What is the matter?" asked Constantin.

"I am pleased," she replied. "I feel free and happy. You know a catastrophe might have happened to me. I might have fallen in love with you. . . . I should have become sentimental" (she raised her eyes to heaven and folded her hands). "I should have uttered sighs" (she sighed to rend the soul). "I should have lost my spirits. I should have become as foolish as my aunt over her lovely doctor. . . . I should not have been able to tear myself from you. I should have waited for you groaning. I should have committed the stupidity of overwhelming you with protestations enough to disgust you. Jealousy would have tortured me. I should always be surprising you at your office. I should telephone you at the house you go to. . . . Perhaps I might even have wept. . . ." (she wiped her eyes). "Do you see my eyes red with tears? . . . Thank God, I shall not know these horrors. Great Prince, I thank you for not having sought to take possession of my heart. I do not know how to express to you my recognition of your having raised pleasure to such a height that it is of itself enough, and of having succeeded in preserving it in its pure essence. You are a real artist. I bow before you. You are the Master."

She knelt in front of him, lowering her forehead to the carpet, then rising again, made a number of ceremonious curtsies.

Again she said:

"I must make a confession to you. Once or twice I thought I was beaten. How terrified I was! . . . How I should have suffered at the moment of parting. . . . What a battle I fought with myself. . . . But I recovered myself again. Since I have withstood you so long, the game is won. Hurrah!"

While she was elaborating these themes, Constantin

listened to her attentively, weighing each word, listening for the slightest shades in the sound of her voice, the tones of her expressions, the stressing of her words. Was she sincere? Was she trying to deceive him? He never caught a false note. She seemed to be expressing herself with complete sincerity.

He limited himself to replying:

"Little girl, whether you like it or not, you love me. You enter once more within the boundaries eternally allotted to your sex; you are the slave."

According to her mood, Ariane shouted with laughter, shrugged her left shoulder or lost her temper.

Sometimes she said to him:

"What about you? Do you love me?"

Constantin was surprised on the first occasion she put the question to him. But he succeeded in hiding his surprise. He rose from the armchair in which he was seated, drew close to the girl, upright before him, took her in his arms and said to her in a caressing tone of reproach:

"But you do not dream of that, my child? How can you think I should love a naughty little girl like you?"

Ariane stood abashed. Which was to be believed? The ironical words or the caress of the voice? Constantin always escaped her. At the moment she thought that she held him, by a sudden twist he slipped through her fingers. Beside him, what were the men she had known in the past? Of the proudest she had in a little while made slaves submissive to her latest whim. Constantin was an opponent worthy of her, baffling. Why did he affect with her this tone of gentle jesting which one uses to children?

She tried to make him jealous. She drew him an enchanting portrait of one of the students who attended her Friday evenings. No woman could resist him. He was, in short, violently in love with her. . . .

"The boy has taste," commented Constantin simply.

"The other night he tried to kiss me. . . ."

"That was his duty as a man."

"Of course, that means nothing to you?"

"Dear little girl," replied Constantin then, "nothing

would be easier than to betray me. But what would be the good? If you do not love me, what are you doing here? Why stay at my side? But if you love me—and that is the evidence—what pleasure would you taste in another man's arms? I have not lived with you for eight months without learning how to understand you. You have had and will have a succession of fancies but you are loyal. There is something proud and rare in your nature. One day you will leave me; you will never betray me."

Ariane, on her side, listened attentively to her lover's conversation, trying to guess what was hidden beneath his words. His tone was never excited. He never appeared to mix sentiment into their talks of amorous casuistry. Were they about herself and himself? It seemed doubtful.

On one point only had she got the advantage of Constantin Michel. She had discovered it on the fifth day of their liaison and thenceforward had made marvellous use of her discovery. The Great Prince wanted Ariane's past to remain always veiled. According to the unwritten laws which run in the Kingdom of Love, these are things of which one never speaks. These are the necessary illusions which every woman is wise enough to cherish. Ariane alone persisted in throwing a crude light on her past.

But the roughness with which Constantin stopped her from the moment she fringed on the forbidden subject, forced her now to scheme to bring about the desired result. Her ingenious mind produced a thousand ways by which she could arrive at tormenting the Great Prince. She had managed to tell him of her recent connection with a celebrated actor. Without having ventured on dangerous details, she was sure that Constantin entertained no doubts of the character of the relations she had had with him. At irregular but frequent intervals, she brought the man into the conversation. They would talk about the stage and suddenly the name of this quondam lover would shoot up by way of a remark. She expounded his virtues, defined his talent, analysed his favourite parts, described his costumes, the way he made up, the way he came on the stage, the magnificent manner he gave to certain classical char-

acters. She only spoke of him, it goes without saying, as a spectator of an actor. At last she would see a certain wrinkle which she well knew come into Constantin's forehead and he would end by saying drily:

"Actors do not interest me. There is no emptier subject of conversation."

Ariane felt her triumph, but she refrained from showing that she had scored a victory.

For many weeks she insisted that they ought to go together to applaud the hero in this or that play in his repertory. Constantin refused utterly. Ariane returned to the attack. Finally Constantin said to her one day:

"If you want to go to the Art Theatre, I will get you a seat; if you want a companion, invite one of your young men and I will get two. This evening I am dining with Madame X——, who has been beseeching me for a long time."

By dint of talking about the actor, she succeeded in bringing him alive in Constantin's mind. He was Ariane's "last lover." She had left his arms to fall into his own. It was to him that she had told the marvellous tales of her life. He had been able to hold this disdainful girl for three months. What kind of man was he? What was his charm in women's eyes? Constantin felt that he would not know Ariane until he had seen with his corporeal eyes this predecessor, who, willy-nilly, haunted his mind. But it would be impossible for him to go to the Art Theatre in Ariane's company, to sit before the stage where suddenly with all the reputation of a great comedian this man would appear amidst the spectators' applause. With her infernal tricks, the girl had wrought his nerves to the point at which he felt himself incapable of undergoing such a trial. Still he must see the man. By this means only could he exorcise the nightmare which obsessed him. He looked over the advertisements. On one Friday he read the well-known name on a programme and had a seat reserved, sure of having the evening free, as Ariane had a party of friends in her students' rooms.

He dined early, annoyed with Ariane and with himself;

then made his way on foot towards the theatre. He walked quickly, immersed in his thoughts, insensible to a cold of thirty degrees which pricked his face. Reaching the lobby, he opened his cloak and found his ticket. Suddenly he started. He tore up the ticket, cast the fragments to the floor, and going into the street, hailed a sleigh. . . . He noticed with surprise that he was sweating. He was also panting.

"I have avoided a great cowardice," he said to himself aloud.

13. The Friend

He shouted an address to the driver and the sleigh fled over the hardened snow.

He took himself to the address of a young woman friend of Baroness Korting. The latter was spending the winter at Pau for her health. Natacha X——, whom he was going to see, was the youthful wife of an officer stationed in Mongolia. She lived in a small house in the Arbat companioned by an elderly aunt of her husband. She was a charming creature, sometimes gay, sometimes melancholy, who at seventeen had made a stupid marriage with a drunken and fortuneless officer whom she did not love. In the arms of a brutal and hurried husband, she conceived the most grievous ideas of love. She did not forget the tears shed in the express which carried her to the Caucasus. Nothing had wiped away that first impression. Since then her husband had tired of her. He contrived to get himself despatched on distant missions and at twenty, Natacha lived a somewhat miserable existence, half abandoned, hesitating, restless, without courage, yet with the hint of a smile at the corners of her young lips. Between her and Constantin there had been born at first sight what they called a sentimental friendship. In Russia, the country where cant does not exist, where education, reduced to an apprenticeship to good manners, leaves all its spontaneity

to Nature, no one is astonished to see sentiment hatch with so much haste and manifest itself with so much simplicity. Without delay Natacha showed every symptom of the responsiveness to Constantin which she felt. At their second meeting she rallied him on his connection with an undergraduate; "too *marvellous,*" it was said. Constantin was extremely surprised to learn that the details of his private life about which he had not breathed a word to a living soul, were known in Baroness Korting's drawing-room. He kept himself from denying anything, thinking it wiser to appear to attach no importance to baseless rumours. But little by little Natacha again returned to the subject which seemed to interest her; Constantin replied in a few short sentences. Nevertheless, on several occasions he allowed to appear the state of irritation into which the difficult nature of the girl plunged him, and the duel with concealed weapons which had been waged between them since they had known each other; this he let drop by covert phrases without betraying himself. Natacha listened to him intently. Her adroit questions were all directed to the same end. She wanted to know what were Constantin's feelings for Ariane. Constantin evaded her. . . . In the end Natacha was eager to make the girl's acquaintance. When she mentioned it for the first time Constantin shrugged his shoulders. She was not discouraged and returned to the charge. At each meeting she tried a new assault. She succeeded so far and so well that Constantin was obliged to promise her to mention the matter to Ariane. He kept his promise, and with some circumspection, broached the topic to Ariane one night when he had a box for the ballet.

He ran against a categorical refusal on the part of Ariane who knew Natacha by sight and who thought her, for all that, pretty and sympathetic.

She answered Constantin with the frankness with which she expressed herself in everything.

"I have no desire to satisfy the curiosity of your women friends. Why do they want to see me? Because I am your mistress? Many thanks, I am not for show. Besides, generally speaking, I hope you never discuss me. . . ."

Still Constantin talked of her to Natacha. The fiercer grew the conflict between them, the more bitter Ariane, the further he felt himself drawn into the discussion of the question which never ceased worrying him. To his mistress he made no allusion, but he discussed the Russian girl of the last generation with Natacha. He said to her one day:

"Do you know anything about these free love leagues which, it appears, are being founded nearly everywhere among the higher classes of girls' schools, and more particularly in Southern Russia and the Caucasus? On my travels I have run across girls who have expounded the *raison d'être*—what shall I call it?—the programme of their leagues. It is curious. These girls, who for the most part are extremely intelligent, imagine that Russia ought to give to a world a new civilisation and that first of all she should break with the conventions which for thirty centuries and more have oppressed society. These child nihilists insist that the most absurd and tyrannical of prejudices is virginity. They do not say, 'By virtue of what law should a girl come to her marriage unsullied?'—for it would insult them to wish to put in discussion marriage, against which they have long formulated a negative attitude. They say, 'Woman possesses equal rights with man as to the disposal of her body. If she pleases she can make it a subject for experiment. She can use it for her pleasure and her convenience. There is no morality in love.' You see how their young brains manufacture these sweet theories and I do not worry myself about them. But I would much like to know at what precise moment the war between theory and practice breaks out. I am assured that the most intelligent of these girls, whirled on by their furious logic, make it a point of honour to yield themselves without love and even without enjoyment to prove to themselves their complete independence. Thus only do they reckon they have conquered, not in words but in deeds, the ancient prejudices . . . Verily this country is a field for the most exciting experiments that can be imagined."

"Yes, but let one of these so clever and so foolish girls happen on a real man, and she is a slave," replied Natacha.

"Have you not recently made an experiment in that direction? You know more than I do on this point. I was a goose when I got married and it did me no good. If I had a daughter, how should I bring her up? I think I should spin a coin. I look upon all this with far less severity than you. Life is so difficult that I am not inclined to condemn in advance the people who, in good faith—even if they mistake themselves—seek a remedy against so many ills."

It should be explained that Constantin Michel and Natacha only met at the house of a common friend. Up to now, despite the friendship he felt for this young woman, he had not called upon her, fearing the ease with which their relations might in a moment change their character. He felt Natacha was attracted to him, and it was pleasant to recall at the moments when the battle he waged with Ariane became more violent and grievous, that were he to break with his mistress, he would find in the Arbat a quiet haven where he could take refuge.

When he was most infuriated against Ariane, in the moments of wrath which she enjoyed rousing by the cool cynicism with which she talked of herself, Constantin often wondered how he could endure living near a child already spoiled and who, despite the charm of her youth and the fame of her brilliant intelligence, was spiteful to the bottom of her soul. Was it the strange feebleness of man in face of the unknown? Was it the fear of the morrow, the terror of the void which seized him? Was he verging on that period of life where one hesitates to throw away what one holds for fear of finding nothing better? Over and over again Constantin had put the question to himself. But his increasing intimacy with Natacha brought him a favourable answer. Tomorrow he could have, if he wished it, a new and charming mistress. And the certainty of still pleasing, which he derived at Natacha's side, gave him more assurance and coolness in the duel engaged between Ariane and himself.

"But still," he asked himself, "if, in spite of her impertinence, in spite of her spitefulness, in spite of the disgust with her which she sometimes brings into my mouth, I

hold her to me, there must be some secret powerful link which binds us. What brew has the young witch made me drink?"

Face to face with Natacha he was unwilling to compromise himself and only saw her rarely. . . .

So in the sleigh which drove him from the Art Theatre, he was much surprised to find that without reflecting he had given the address of his sentimental friend.

The windows of the ground floor where Natacha lived were lighted. He was shown by the servant into a huge poorly furnished room. A few minutes later Natacha came in.

She was dressed in a white wrap and had thrown a bright-coloured scarf over her shoulders. Her dark loose hair framed a pure face. Her laughing brown eyes shone with pleasure. She held out both hands to Constantin, came close to touch him and said in a musical voice whose sweetness he had already appreciated:

"What a surprise to see you here! To what drama do I owe your presence in my house? You could have telephoned me. I would have provided a reception worthy of you and done my hair in your honour. . . . Let us get out of here. It is too cold and solemn. Come into my room."

She drew him by the hand into a little room, the whole of one side of which was occupied by a couch. The samovar was brought in and soon began to bubble. A table was covered with preserves, honey, bonbons and fruit. Natacha was seated close to her friend. At moments when she leaned forward, he could see the firm curve of her breasts beneath the half-open wrap. . . . A faint scent rose to his nostrils. He felt happy, relaxed, far away from the daily battles in an atmosphere of affection from which a touch of sensuality was not missing. He held the young woman's hand and sometimes carried it to his lips. They talked lightly at random of anything and everything. The watchful Natacha asked no indiscreet questions. Time slid by without their counting its beat. As the evening grew later, Constantin drew his friend to him and wound his arms round her. He kissed the nape of her neck. She scarcely resisted.

"What are you doing?" she asked.
Then she added in a whisper:
"I am afraid . . ."

14 The Little House in the Suburbs

It was late when he got back to his hotel. His heart contracted as at the approach of a scene. "She is home already," he said to himself. "What will she have thought at not finding me in the house?" He opened the door of the sitting-room. It was in darkness; only a ray of light from the neighbouring room filtered through the crack of the door. He proceeded into the lighted dining-room and then into the bedroom. Ariane was not there. Still he saw her hat and her fur coat thrown in a heap upon the bed. "What has happened?" he asked himself. A deathly anguish overcame him. For no reason, he feared the worst. He ran to the bathroom; it was empty.

He called.

"Ariane! Ariane!"

No one answered. He came back to the sitting-room, switched on the light. Ariane was lying on the couch, her face buried in a cushion, her hair scattered. She was crouching under a Paisley shawl and, so huddled together, looked like a little ten year old girl abandoned by everyone, overwhelmed by despair.

He knelt beside her and tried to kiss her. She resisted. He tried to force her to turn around.

"Let me alone; let me alone," she said; "go away."

Then he picked her up in his arms and tried to look at her, but she buried her face in his neck, and as he carried her into the bedroom, he felt warm drops sliding down his neck. . . . She was crying. . . . He laid her on the bed and began to cover her face with kisses. But all of a sudden she sat up, broke into a tinkling laugh and cried:

"I did not do that badly, did I? What do you think?"

He stood thunderstruck, while in a mocking voice she

explained that she could shed real tears at will and that if her idiotic family had not prevented her from going on the stage, she would have made an unheard of success as an actress.

"Why did I have the weakness not to listen to X——?" she wailed. "He wanted to take me along with him and give me lessons. I should have come out at the Art Theatre. I should have been famous to-day. . . ."

An hour later, furious, she went to sleep at the edge of the bed. But when she woke the next morning it was in her lover's arms.

For some time Constantin had noticed that the girl had periods of unhappiness. Sometimes she passed the whole evening neither speaking nor reading, huddled on the couch rolled up in a huge shawl. If he asked her she replied:

"It is nothing; do not pay any attention."

On other occasions she would say:

"I am worried; don't trouble yourself about me."

If he persisted, she refused him any enlightenment, let him think she had an unpleasant letter from home, that business matters difficult to arrange had arisen, but that he was not concerned in them. By joining up the threads of actual information elicited from confused replies and by recalling a scene they had had in the Crimea, Constantin tried to guess the secret which Ariane wished to conceal from him. He half saw an enigmatic dark tale in which money played some part.

Suddenly one evening he learned the truth.

During the day Ariane had remained silent, unfriendly, and her few remarks were so unpleasant that Constantin, in anger, had decided to dine at a restaurant alone. He had come home early. She did not open her mouth throughout the evening, reading Pushkin's verse, stretched on the couch.

Now, the light out, side by side in their narrow bed, they wooed sleep. Suddenly Constantin thought he caught a stifled sigh. He did not move. Ariane was shaken by

short nervous spasms which she tried vainly to restrain. An unbearable feeling of anguish squeezed his heart. More than ever he trembled at these night scenes. When he could not see Ariane's insolent eyes and mocking lips, when he felt the freshness of her youthful body next him, he was powerless and thought himself open to every cowardice. But on that evening sleep was impossible. The foreshadowed scene was not to be avoided. He took the girl in his arms and said:

"What is the matter?"

"I am unhappy," she returned, pressing against him.

He plied her with questions. She refused to answer.

"No, no," she said, "I cannot. If I told you the truth, you would love me no longer. You would drive me away. . . . It is a horrible thing."

The words put Constantin into a whirl. "Aha," he said to himself, "she has certainly betrayed me. In a fit of fury after one of our countless quarrels, she has thrown herself into the arms of some man. . . . Now she cannot face me with such a burden on her conscience. . . . Would I might have the strength to listen to her. Heaven give me courage to break with her, to put an end to these torments. Let her speak at last and I will tear her from me."

Rent by these contrary feelings, trembling at the thought of losing Ariane, he would have liked to postpone the decisive explanation. Yet at the same time he was on fire to know the truth. He forced himself to reassure his mistress, to persuade her that he would be all indulgence, and that only falsehood would make a rupture inevitable. He led her to confess at last. But broken with sobs she interrupted herself at each instant. He had to guess, to cross-examine her.

It arose out of a question of money.

"On what do you think I live here?" she asked him.

"I do not know," he replied. "You have never wished to let me broach the subject. . . . I suppose your aunt who is rich . . ."

"I have never had a penny from my aunt," she broke in. There was a long silence.

"One more effort," thought Constantin, rigid with grief, "and I shall know everything."

At last in short phrases cut in two with sighs and tears, she told of her disagreement with her father and her aunt during the past summer and of the call she had made on the engineer.

"I believed," she said—"do you understand me?—that I could, while still surrendering nothing of myself, buy my independence by lending my body. The end I wanted to reach justified everything in my eyes. . . . I was not selling myself. If I had wanted money I could have had a fortune at X——. But no, I stood in need of two hundred roubles a month to live at the University. Note that I can return the amount advanced on my coming of age. I had a rich friend; I thought I was remaining free . . ."

Little by little the details emerged precisely and clearly; the number of appointments, the strictly limited time she spent at the little house in the suburbs, the obligation she was under to go home for the holidays on the stated date. She had not understood the horror of her position until the day she had met Constantin; she wished to be no one's but his. But the other man out there was expecting her. She must pay and keep her bond. . . .

After two hours of this nocturnal dialogue, weeping bitterly she begged Constantin not to let her go south or to drive her out as she deserved.

Constantin was frozen with horror. He suffocated with disgust. A phrase kept coming to his tongue, but died on his lips. "What beastliness, what beastliness!" She had placed between them an insurmountable barrier. How could he forget in the moment when he took her in his arms, that she had surrendered to the caresses of a sick man? Everything was over between them. . . . And yet his heart was touched by pity. Had he the right to condemn Ariane? She had only made a mistake of judgment. Her heart had not sinned; it had remained pure; her tears were the proof. After this revelation, strangely enough, she was dearer to him than ever—and that at the very moment when he could no longer bear her presence.

In the grip of an emotion which he could not quench, he pressed her to him, stroking her, seeking to calm her grief. He wanted to talk to her; he could only find phrases like "Poor little girl," "Dear heart," and for the first time the two lovers wept in each other's arms until at last, broken with fatigue, at dawn sleep overcame them.

15. *Deeper*

On the night following his mistress's confession, when the light was out, Constantin once more took up their previous evening's conversation. In a well-simulated tone of indifference, he said to her:

"When you made this arrangement last year, you were not then innocent?"

She made a shiver of revolt; then, quieting herself, replied in a low voice:

"No."

"You had a lover at that moment then?"

"Yes."

"And he was your first lover?"

She answered viciously:

"Let me alone. That has nothing to do with you."

But Constantin, angry at heart, went on in a cold voice, "You know very well that now you have nothing to conceal from me. And I am so built that I cannot live to-day without knowing the whole truth. Tell me that again. Your lover of that time was not the first?"

"No," returned Ariane, "no."

Constantin did not start. Yet every word uttered by Ariane pierced him like the stab of a knife. In his mind he counted up. "That makes four lovers; the first, unknown; the second, who was in possession at the dramatic moment; the third, a banker; the fourth, the Art Theatre actor. Besides those of whom I know nothing but whose acquaintance I shall make before I leave her. She is eighteen. She has not lost much time. She has learned how to make her

living too. She is an intoxicating hussy, but a hussy for all that. . . ."

Meanwhile, in the night which enveloped them, with an arm round Ariane's supple body, he continued to talk with her in a steely voice and an impersonal tone. He went to lengths of self-torture. It seemed as if he wanted to calculate how much suffering he could endure. He compared himself to a surgeon who, gripped by the desire to study a difficult case, performs with the sharpened knife a dangerous operation on his own body.

"I do not understand," he said. "There are certain things still obscure in this, but which I want to know. Explain, I beg you. When you had been to the little house in the suburbs, had you broken with the lover you had then? Or did you think you had the right to return to him on the same day?"

"How can you ask a thing like that?" exclaimed Ariane indignantly. . . . "I was ill when I left the house in the suburbs. I went home to my aunt's house, I was shivering with fever. . . . Olga Dimitrievna put me to bed. She kissed me incessantly. . . . Pacha brought me tea. She cried without knowing why. . . . Please, do not ask me anything more. I must forget. . . ."

Christmas came without Ariane leaving Moscow. Two days later Constantin saw a telegram open on the girl's vanity bag. Mechanically he picked it up. It read as follows:

"When do you arrive? It is past the date arranged."

Ariane was not present. He crumpled up the telegram and threw it into the wastepaper basket.

Christmas! Yes, it was in her contract to pass the holidays beside him whom she called her banker. She was failing in her obligations. He ground his teeth at the thought that she might have been able to leave him to appear at the little house in the suburbs.

He saw her arrival at dusk; the door would open immediately. She would come in, take off from her wrist the bracelet he had put there. "It is six o'clock," she would say (she had concealed no details of the appointment). He was

stifled with rage and distaste. . . . And yet, since he was going to break with her, why had he kept her back in Moscow? Had he obeyed a spasm of pity in face of the girl's distress? By what curious weakness did he still prolong this entanglement? He recalled the unconquerable urge which had borne him one evening to Baroness Korting. Why had he not stayed at this charming woman's side? No, he had returned to Ariane; together they had gone to the Crimea. In New York even, far from her, he had trembled with pleasure at the idea that his business would take him back to Moscow. Then a whole winter of bitter fights, a pitiless hand-to-hand struggle . . .

Now the measure was full. His decision was taken. He had been able to keep Ariane a few days longer, but he was aware that since he had known the story of the little house in the suburbs, their lives, one instant mingled, were about to divide. Already in his mind he planned a journey to Petersburg. He would go away alone and would not return. . . . A little patience, the time required to put his business in order, a few weeks perhaps? What matter? He could wait. Besides, what else did he fear thereafter?

Ariane could not make him suffer now.

16. *Another Supper*

On new year's eve they supped together outside Moscow at Yar's. Ariane drank champagne and was merry. On the stage a gipsy chorus sang strange tunes with broken rhythms. Their whining voices summoned up the spicy, feverish east. At midnight Ariane held out her glass to Constantin and took his in return.

"With whom will you be supping next year?" she said. "With whom, I? Bah! Let us drink!"

She emptied her glass.

They stayed long in the huge room in the thick of the noise of the diners and the din of the orchestra. Indifferent to what was happening round her, the exchange of kisses,

arms slid round waists, Ariane recounted with infinite grace stories of her marvellous childhood and how she had made the discovery of the world.

Leaning towards her, Constantin listened, and when she had finished, said:

"I should have loved to have met you then. I should have run off with you. At my command very wise old women and mild men crammed with knowledge would have educated you apart. They would have taught you to dance, to sing, to speak and the poets' verses. For three years they would have steeped you like Esther in aromatics; then, when you had become a maiden full of accomplishments, they would have led you in procession to my couch."

She shrugged her left shoulder and replied:

"Do you think you could have loved me other than I am? You would have been the first to take me, the sweet prize! and you would have abandoned me very quickly!"

They went out. The night was cold and overcast. They climbed into a sleigh, and, sheltered behind the gigantic driver in his padded sheepskin, took the road to Moscow at full gallop. Ariane nestled against Constantin.

"I am a little drunk," she remarked. "This night last year I was in the country. We had a supper party and, as to-night, I drank too much champagne. But you were not there to look after me . . ."

Constantin clenched his fists. Yet once again he felt himself possessed of the morbid desire to know what Ariane had to reveal. He leaned towards his mistress and whispered softly:

"Champagne excuses many things. If your story is amusing, tell it to me."

"No, I shall say nothing," she replied. "You do not understand me and you are terrifyingly severe."

They reached the hotel without exchanging another word. Once more Constantin's nerves were on edge.

While they were drinking tea, he took Ariane on to his knees. He began playing with her, joking and laughing. Then coming back to his obsession, he said:

"Confess yourself, little monster. You tell tales with unrivalled art."

"There are times," she replied, "when I think I am mad . . . Madness is not a thing to talk about. A lunatic is convinced that there is a mathematical logic in everything he says and does. We do not understand the hidden reasons which move him. We only see his actions and these we assert are not regulated; still for all that, they too obey a personal logic, possibly more correct than our own, which we can not judge . . ."

"Dear little philosopher," bantered Constantin, although he felt like the victim awaiting the sacrificial knife.

"Anyhow it is certain," Ariane went on gravely, "that our own logic is fragile. Usually we act in a certain manner. We think ourselves capable of this and not of that. One glass of champagne too much . . . and we are suddenly transformed . . . We were a party of young people who had supper on New Year's Eve at the Hotel de Londres. Gipsies like to-night, wine and that atmosphere of our town which you do not know, and talk which intoxicates more than wine. It was already past midnight . . . Enter our handsome doctor, Vladimir Ivanovitch. He came up to us, sat down near me and, looking me in the eyes, drank to the New Year which he said would bring him luck. I understood what he was thinking of and moved by secret impulse, answered, 'To the New Year.' At the moment he spoke I felt that I was yielding to a temptation which I had hitherto withstood, but which suddenly seemed to me irresistible. For two years Aunt Varvara had never stopped glorifying the doctor in the long talks she had with me. He was a superman. In the list of the eighteen lovers she had had, he seemed unique. The others were the prophets of the new Messiah. The praises she lavished on him had ended by pricking my curiosity. What exceptional virtue did Vladimir Ivanovitch possess? It is not wise to wake a woman's curiosity for to what lengths will she not go if impelled by this imp? As I have told you, the doctor was madly in love with me. I might if he had shown no interest in my person, have tried to attract him. No: the only desire in me was the curiosity. I thought it over and asked myself for reasons why I should refrain from trying an experiment with Vladimir Ivanovitch. What was there about this man

to make my aunt insist that he was extraordinary? What lesson should I learn from this incomparable lover? . . . Such was my reasoning and yet I do not know what held me back. It was not the idea of causing pain to Aunt Varvara. She would know nothing of this brief episode . . . It would be much as if I were to betray you once, just once. You would not know of it and so would not be hurt. . . . But there was something repugnant in sharing a lover with her . . . And besides I was very pleasantly occupied elsewhere. So I kept the doctor in reserve. And that is how on that evening at supper, when he emptied his glass of champagne, every feeling save that of curiosity was purged from me. I at once said to myself, 'How silly of me! What is all this? Nothing, nothing at all. Have I not the right to do what I like and to learn this marvellous secret?' Observe, I beg you, that I was now no more in love than before. I saw Vladimir Ivanovitch as I had seen him the previous evening. Only I was obeying the laws of a new logic before which everything bowed. I was disagreeable to him during the rest of supper, all the more because he was now wearing an expression of self-assurance in the highest degree irritating. He listened to my impertinences with a half smile. I wanted to smack his face . . . In short, when we came out, he snatched me from my escort and put me into his sleigh. 'I am going out on to the main road,' I said. 'Right; on to the main road,' he repeated to the driver. And we sped into the frozen night, I half lying in his arms in the manner of the best traditions. I was benumbed, far away from myself and yet I maintained a complete clarity of mind, watching everything that was happening as at a show. Vladimir did not talk. When we had gone several versts along the high road, he called to the driver, 'Home.' I heard but made no protest. We reached his house. He had a little building away from his house where he took his patients. We went in . . . Oh, how hot it was in that room! . . . I spoke and was astonished at the sound of my voice . . . There was too much light . . ."

Ariane broke off her tale at this point. Constantin thought she looked pale.

"How you are clutching me; I can scarcely breathe," she said, trying to get free.

He noticed that his arm was in fact constricting Ariane's thin chest to the point of suffocating her.

He loosened his arm. There was silence.

"And then?" he asked.

"Then," she replied, "there happened what had to happen . . . and I understood for the first time that Vladimir Ivanovitch was as second-rate as all the others—excepting you, of course," she interjected with an ironical smile—"and that my aunt . . ."

At this point, Constantin thrust her from him so brutally that she fell on to the floor and her head almost struck against the leg of the table. She lay crushed, a little formless heap shaken rhythmically by sobs . . .

Constantin made a few faltering steps, then seized his cloak and his fur cap and went out, slamming the door after him.

He did not return till six in the morning. Ariane was stretched on the couch. A shawl covered her; she was asleep.

"Come to bed," he said in a hard voice.

She looked as if she would resist. He pulled her roughly by the arm. Submissively she went into the bedroom. They went to sleep side by side without speaking. The few inches between them seemed to form an unbridgeable gulf.

17. *Juvenilia*

Constantin Michel's business still delayed him for some weeks, during which he continued to live with Ariane. He felt he had not the strength to break with her and remain in Moscow. He must on the day of the inevitable rupture, flee to Petersburg.

Knowing the girl's character and the peak of self-esteem to which she had raised herself, he was aware that it would be enough for him to put into words his desire to end things

for her to leave him at once. This proud girl would be capable, out of pique, of taking to herself a lover on the very day she parted from him, in such a way as to make any return impossible. She would not write; she would not telephone; she would not pursue him to Petersburg.

In the meanwhile, he was near her in the same intimacy. But he looked on her as someone to whom one has been closely bound and whom one is about to lose. At this breaking point, now that the sacrifice had been consummated in his mind, he talked to her with kindness. He no longer grew angry, no longer abused her; he had shed the icy dryness which he had worn as armour against her. Now they held long conversations without argument. Both avoided dangerous topics, irritating questions, phrases from which the sparks would fly.

Often he made her tell him stories of her entrancing childhood.

One evening, in answer to some clumsy expression of Ariane, he said laughing:

"How badly you were brought up, little girl."

"Wrong," she answered, "I was not brought up at all. I will tell you if it will amuse you, how my childhood was passed. When I was little, we had a flat in Rome for the winter. My mother was beautiful, elegant and much sought after. I lived apart with my governess, a Frenchwoman called Mlle. Victoire. She was an old maid of about forty, pious and kind, with no brains. Child as I was, I was a little phenomenon, that is, I had so supple a memory that one reading of a piece was enough for me to know it by heart, and as no one bothered about what I was doing, you can see whither that might lead me. At four, I had set myself to reading practically unaided. I remember a chemistry book happened into my hands. I learned the first page and at table one day when there were several people to lunch, my godfather asked me what I knew. Off I went reciting my page of chemistry without a slip. I did not understand a word of it, of course; but they did not know that. . . . And there they were, stupid with admiration, could hardly cut short their praises and compliments. My

mother who never troubled about me was full of pride. . . . So, later, when there were guests in the drawing-room, I would be sent for. Mlle. Victoire would put me into a white dress with a large sash, curl my hair and I would make my entrance. I would have to tell stories. Then the ladies would kiss me and the men ask me questions. Nothing was more unpleasant than the kisses of these faded women. When they put their arms round me, I used to say, 'Be quick; not on the lips, and don't slobber over me.' Then all these fools would laugh. I soon felt humiliated by being exhibited like a performing dog. One day I absolutely refused to appear in the drawing-room. Huge scandal. My father came to find me. His prayers and his threats were in vain. I clung to my bed and when he tried to pick me up, I made the house ring with my screams. It ended by my being left in peace with Mlle. Victoire. We used to go for long walks together and I would take her down to the filthiest slums in Rome. The poor old thing was terrified, begged me to come home, crossed herself furiously, and dragged me into the first church we came to. There she said her prayers in order to settle her feelings, and lit a candle, while I ran about the church amusing myself by hopping on one foot from flagstone to flagstone down the aisles.

"Later, when I was ten or twelve, my mother took to making use of me. She had cleverly guessed that I had nothing but contempt for my father, and that although there was no intimacy between her and me, I should never give her away.

"Why did I have this feeling for my father? I rarely saw him for he was always travelling. I remember that even when I was quite tiny, I had felt that he did not love me. He was kind and weak, but he treated me like a doll. When he talked of me, to my mother, he always said, 'This little thing . . . This little thing is very intelligent. . . . This little thing is very curious,' and so on. He never scolded me, but he was like a stranger who might have lived with us for a few months in the year. Once I was present at a violent scene between him and my mother. He arrived unexpectedly from Petersburg. What did he find about the

house to displease him? It is a mystery, but at lunch, on some remark from my mother, he lost his temper and for what reason I know not, overwhelmed her with reproaches. She answered coldly. Then he rose, flung his napkin to the ground, and shouted, 'I am going and I shall never come back.' 'A pleasant journey,' retorted my mother. He kissed me and left the room. At that moment I felt some respect for him. It looked to me as if he had behaved like a hero. . . . On the same evening he left for Paris. I had never thought so much of my father. He had not yielded. He had done as he determined. For a fortnight I admired him. . . . Then suddenly one morning I found him in my mother's bedroom seated on the bed. He had come back in the night. When I came in, it looked as if I were disturbing them. Both were laughing very loudly and my mother was toying with a pearl necklace which he had brought her. From that day I had nothing but contempt for him. . . .

"But it does not matter about that; I wanted to tell you how my mother used to use me for very obscure purposes, about which she would tell me nothing.

"By this time I was a big girl. That winter we were at Cannes and had a villa at Californie. I used to go to lectures in the town every morning. Mlle. Victoire accompanied me. But I came home alone by tram, for I would not allow myself to be always escorted by the good Victoire. . . . Mamma—it surprised me—had permitted the arrangement. She gave me little commissions to execute for her. I was proud of having secured my independence at twelve. One day, my mother said to me:

" 'Ask at the post office if there is anything for this number.'

"She handed me a scrap of paper on which I saw written: '*X.B. 167, poste restante.*' After leaving my lecture, I went across to the post office and handed in my note at the pigeon hole. The clerk, an elderly man with spectacles, looked at me, shrugged his shoulders, muttered an 'All the same, it is sad,' took from the shelf a bundle of papers, and selecting one, threw it over to me in an ill-humoured way. I brought it back to mamma who kissed me and gave me

chocolates. The same stratagem was repeated at intervals. She never told me not to talk about these missions to the post office, but I distinctly felt that there was a secret between us. If my father was near her when I came in with a letter, I took care to keep it. One spring day I was at the post office and going up to the desk when my father stood before me.

" 'What are you doing here?' he asked in a kindly voice.

"I had a moment of terror. I at once guessed that he had been spying on me and that he suspected my manœuvres. But at the same instant I knew he had committed a tactical error. Had he waited a couple of minutes longer, I should have been caught. I said to myself, 'What stupidity! Still, in him it is not surprising.' And I answered:

" 'I have come to buy some stamps.'

" 'But there are plenty in the house,' he said in a hard voice.

" 'Possibly for you and mamma. For my own letters, I buy stamps myself.'

"He could get nothing out of me. I did not breathe a word of this incident to mamma. How could I talk about it to her? There was no intimacy, only complicity between us."

She stopped, drank a mouthful of tea, and lit a cigarette.

Constantin remained silent and unhappy. She looked at him and said:

"Would you like one more sketch to understand the relations between my mother and me? . . . We were in Rome a year before her death; I was not quite thirteen. I spoke and wrote Italian as well as I do Russian. One day my mother came into my room. She seemed embarrassed. She held out a letter written in Italian.

" 'Listen, Babs,' she said. 'Here is a letter I want you to correct for me. A friend and I are writing an Italian novel, a novel in letters. But I am not as good as you. You must help me, oh, but only over grammatical mistakes.'

"She went away and I read the letter. It was a wild rodomontade of love in which the heroine recalled the intoxication of past meetings and begged for the grace of one

more. . . . It was crammed with mistakes. I corrected it and handed it back to my mother that evening without a word. She thanked me and talked about other things. You may judge whether I was duped by her fairy tale. . . . I remember a naval officer who had been much about the house and who had disappeared. . . . That is how I was brought up, Sir Critic. Now dare to make your comments. . . ."

Constantin sighed and said nothing.

18. The Arbat

When he was restless and worried, Constantin often retired to Natacha's house. He took shelter far away from the stormy atmosphere of the Hotel National in a new world where everything was kindness, calm and affection. In Natacha's company, the approaching rupture with Ariane, the rupture at which he trembled, appeared easier.

They dined together on several occasions, a fact he did not conceal from Ariane. Since he had decided to break, he had taken on a different tone with her, talked in a more detached manner and made no mystery of his frequent meetings with the young woman. Ariane listened to him with indifference.

"I shall take advantage of my liberty," she said, "to go to the Art Theatre with a friend."

On these evenings in the Arbat, seated on the couch at Natacha's side, he talked with her while the samovar murmured softly. Natacha often sat silent and watched Constantin Michel. Sometimes he came in with haggard face, nervous, tired, cynical in his remarks. At other times he smiled, was happy, and had command of himself. She guessed that a tragedy was being enacted in his mind of which she remained ignorant. They never talked of Ariane. By a tacit agreement she never came between them, although they were continually aware of her secret presence.

During the passage of these quiet hours, Constantin sometimes took his friend in his arms and put his lips to her bare shoulder; Natacha did not resist; she surrendered herself to these dangerous caresses. Thus they deliberately prolonged an equivocal situation in which Constantin's hesitations and the young woman's shyness were both gratified.

Constantin's surprise was thus the greater when one evening Natacha posed him a direct question.

"Are you in love with Ariane Nicolaevna?"

It was a few days after the supper at Yar's and the girl's tale of her visit to the doctor, Vladimir Ivanovitch. Constantin was still upset.

He started at the question. It seemed to him as if the voice which had just spoken was the echo of his own conscience. He reflected for an instant, then making up his mind, replied frankly:

"No, I am not in love with her. . . . I have lived with her, am much attached to her, for she is a girl with marvellous gifts, sparkling and exciting. But for certain reasons which I cannot explain to you, for I am not sure that I understand them myself, she has with an implacable will and infernal art taken pains to prevent love growing between us. Possibly she does love me, but she would rather die than let me have a glimpse of it. . . . I could have loved her; she would not have it. That is why I have made up my mind to leave her. Our separation is at hand; that is why I cannot talk of it to you. Once again she will begin a life of episodes and experiments to which I could not apply the epithet of romantic, for there was never a colder heart, a steadier head in wildness, served by more ardent senses. . . . And I shall be free," he said, leaning towards Natacha. . . . "Dear friend, ask me no more to-day. I am leaving for Petersburg. When I come back, give me leave to ask myself to dinner at your house."

19. The School-Girl

It was early when he left Natacha's house. He covered the distance from the Arbat to the hotel on foot. The conversation which he had just had confirmed him in his resolution to hasten the rupture with Ariane. By speaking aloud the thoughts which continually haunted his mind, he came to the conclusion that he must make an end of things as quickly as possible. He mulled over his grievance against Ariane. How could he go on living with a capricious, cynical girl who took pleasure in torturing him, in preparing and letting fly the venomous shafts? While walking, he little by little grew angrier until he reached the point of loathing Ariane, whom his mind painted in the blackest colours.

The flat was lit. The first three rooms were bare. He found Ariane in the bathroom and pulled himself up bewildered, so different was the appearance she presented from the image he had conjured up on his way.

She had put on once more the loose knee-high smock of the school-girl. Her loosened hair fell down to her hips. She looked a fourteen-year-old, tall and precocious, with dancing eyes and a mouth already shaped for kisses.

She flung herself on his neck and hung there like a child.

"How late you are," she cried; "come and look, I have just developed those photographs we took the other week. Look, you are as handsome as Lucifer; you really are the Great Prince, the only specimen . . . I, horrible as usual, ragged, not fit to touch. Only the negative that shows me stretched on the couch is fairly successful."

She handed him a negative which showed her in the pose of Goya's Maja, clad in silk pyjamas. The open coat revealed one round jutting perfectly moulded breast.

Constantin leaned against the door, so abrupt was the contrast between the Ariane who had followed his path

from the Arbat to the hotel and the unrestrained tomboy who had flung herself round his neck He looked at the negative, then at the girl, and gaily said:

"I like you better as a school-girl than in the photograph. It is true you have all the look of a naughty girl, but one feels that one could still administer the appropriate punishment."

"Just try and you will soon find out," she said. "No one has ever dared to lay a finger on me." She fled into the sitting-room. He followed her.

"I have not dined, you know," she said. "I am dying of hunger. Order some supper. I will tell you stories of my school days."

A little later while they were eating, she told him recollections of her life at the school.

"We had a priest to instruct us in religious history. He was a delightful man between forty and fifty, with a huge pepper and salt beard and merry blue eyes, so merry. . . . We all adored him and he liked us too. I used to amuse myself by putting difficult questions to him. I was fourteen then, and I raised a great scandal in the class one day when he was telling us the story of Adam and Eve. I said to him, *'Batiouchka,* do please explain something that I do not understand . . . At the beginning of the world, there were only Adam and Eve and no one else?' . . . 'Certainly, my child.' 'And Cain and Abel were their sons, I know. But then how did these four have children? Could sons marry their mother at that time, as daughters did their fathers under the Pharaohs?' Of course the whole class burst out laughing and the *batiouchka* seeing us like this, let himself become infected with the contagion, and instead of answering, laughed with us. The chaperon was the only person who did not laugh. She went to fetch the head mistress. I had such an innocent air that they could not punish me, but for the future it was forbidden to ask questions in scripture lessons. 'These mysteries are mysteries,' said the head mistress, 'and cannot be explained.'

"The good father bore me no malice. We became great friends. He often would wait for me in the corridor and

stroke my cheek or take me by the arm. I used to flirt with him; I used to make eyes at him. One day when we had a dance at the school, I met him in a passage. 'Well, Koustnetzova,' he said, 'you are dancing to-night.' 'Do come, father,' I answered, 'and I will open the dance with you.' 'I cannot, my child,' he sighed, 'we do not go to balls.' 'So, you do not know how to dance. Wouldn't you like me to give you a lesson?' And I held out a hand to him. 'I did know,' he replied. 'I did know, but I have forgotten.' (He had taken my hand and put his arm round my waist.) 'And then this accursed frock.' 'Nonsense; it is no longer than mine.' And I began to hum *Troika*. And there was the father swinging lightly round and I in his arms. As he bent his knees, his frock swept the floor and raised the dust. . . . We caught the noise of a door opening; he stopped abruptly. . . . "What lunacy," he said, and took to his heels, laughing. . . . Ah the dear man! He really loved me. . . . Troubles have fallen on him. He had a daughter a year older than I. She was a gawky creature with a face like Discord. But she was beautifully made and was always exhibiting herself half naked. She took lovers as a man takes mistresses, and drank too much at supper parties. She fell head over heels in love with an elderly actor and when he left the town, she went off with him. Everyone talked about it and the father's position became difficult. . . . But the head mistress, Mme. Známenskaya, took his side and kept him. . . . I believe he has taken to drink since this misfortune. . . ."

So they passed a delightful evening with Ariane recounting scenes of her life at the school. Already he knew the greater part of the chief actors about whom the crowd of suppers buzzed. He was struck by the consummate art with which Ariane vivified the companions of her youth for him. Beneath this fairy's wand it was a whole world which danced, which filled the room, whose shadows would hover for a few moments after the sorceress's words were hushed, then would disappear and return once more to the night, whence she had summoned them.

Said Constantin to Ariane:

"The town I know best in Russia is one which I have never seen—the one in which you grew up."

20. The Spirit of Perdition

At other times, however, it seemed as if a demon had taken possession of the girl. She did not make scenes in a woman's usual way. She did not raise her voice. She addressed no reproach to Constantin. But by covert remarks and vague allusions, lacunæ, silence, reticences, she allowed him to guess what she affected not to talk of openly. She thus shed unexpected light on her earlier life and on the experiences into which she had been drawn by her curiosity and by the 'ardour of her temperament'—this was the expression she employed to make Constantin understand that the senses, if one was in possession of one's senses, had as much right to develop themselves naturally, as intelligence has with those who possess brains, and sentimentality in the case of anæmic girls. She frequently amused herself by discussing sexual relations in the most cynical way, free-love being one of her favourite themes.

"It is obvious," she would say, "that the world was created by men to their own taste and for their own advantage. They have set up a morality which suits them and have been clever enough to create a universal standard under which whatever we may do, we remain slaves. I am not a feminist in the modern sense of the word. To bring the feminine question into the arena of politics seems to me largely stupid. A fine weapon for us to elect our representatives in the Duma! I think we shall only achieve our true rights when the prejudices which bind us more narrowly than concrete laws are destroyed. I have often thought it. And I will tell you where the real injustice in this matter lies . . ."

"Mark my words . . ." broke in Constantin, ironically, with a phrase frequently on Ariane's lips.

"Do not make fun of me! You are going to see what I

mean. . . . Don Juan is an eternal hero to men because he possessed a thousand and three women. He boasts of it; from that he acquires his glory and prestige. But how would a woman who took a thousand and three lovers be looked on? She would be considered the lowest of harlots. There would be nothing but contempt for her. If she was not a professional, her family would have her shut up in an asylum, as hysterical. . . . Well, that injustice is the supreme injustice against which I want to fight. As long as this prejudice exists, we shall not be your equals. If we take a lover it must be done in secret. Men talk freely of the mistresses they have kept. And we are condemned to silence! Why? Have we not the same right as you to pluck our amusement where we find it? Man's interest is to have plenty of mistresses and to have them faithful to him. They have, therefore, glorified the seducer in art, poetry and literature and fixed the mask of infamy to the woman who takes many lovers. That is the objective of our battle. Woman's attitude in the face of life must be brought to triumph. It is for that that I am working. . . ."

Constantin looked at the girl who had become animated with talking. He felt disquietude growing on him: the storm was beginning to growl. He was rash enough to contradict Ariane by interjections:

"It comes to knowing what one wants. Do you want to be loved by your lovers? If yes, I counsel you not to speak to each of them of the joys you have tasted in his predecessors' arms."

"Now why?" exclaimed Ariane aggressively.

"Because, my child, you will disgust them and they will leave you."

"And if I want to be loved beyond that and in spite of it? You know me, I think, and you know that, like you, I do not like easy things and that, like you, I do not fear danger. Well, I do not want to owe my success to lying. To deceive men, to persuade them that I have never loved anyone before them, that they suck from my lips the first breath of happiness. . . . Oh, shocking! Do you really think you are obliged to use such subterfuges? Did you make any declara-

tion of that kind when you met me? Why, then, should *I* lower myself? I want to be loved in such a way that everything about me is accepted and that I am taken as I am with all my past. . . . And if he does not like it, well! let him get out! And I shall have no regrets for the man who leaves me so. . . ."

She hurled the last sentence in a tone of defiance, looking Constantin in the face, awaiting his reply. He sat for a moment silent, then in an indifferent voice, said:

"There is a great amount of sophistry in what you are saying, and I hate sophistry. I do not speculate on what is going to happen three thousand years hence. I belong to my own era and I live with women of my own generation. If one of them cannot make me happy, I leave her for another. It is much easier than turning the course of society. . . ."

Ariane had become pale. Her eyebrows knitted.

"Man only triumphs because we are weak. If we were to show our strength, the positions would alter. . . . You, after all, have not left me. . . ."

"Do, please, drop the subject, Ariane," said Constantin.

"No," she said quickly, "let us talk openly once and for all. There is something frightful and unexplained that hangs over us; we must see clearly and let the consequences go hang! I have often tried to speak the truth and you have always stopped me. To-day, whatever may come of it, we are going to get to the bottom of things."

Constantin had risen. He drew himself up in front of Ariane, who watched him vindictively.

"Well," he remarked, "I challenge you to tell me how many lovers you have had?"

The girl hesitated for a second, then carried away by rage, she said:

"You want to know. Listen: to-day I will not hold back. The first took me when I was sixteen. I did not love him, but I wanted to know what was this love which they dinned into our ears. I dismissed him the next day, I could not bear him longer . . . The second I thought I loved; I was mistaken. He was an ass who wept at my feet. The third you

know: the little house in the suburbs. Before I left for Moscow, I found consolation in the arms of a student who worshipped me . . . In Moscow, I knew the Art Theatre actor. On New Year's Day, as I have told you, my aunt's lover took me to his house . . . In the train that took me home, an officer who had been in love with me for two years, was clever enough to slip into my carriage and managed to win me for a few hours. I have never seen him again. And then I met you, you, the eighth . . . Your reign has by itself been longer than that of the others put together. Admire your strength and take pleasure in the admiration of yourself. . . . So far you know everything. If we continue living together, you will have nothing more to learn. Decide."

There was a long silence. Constantin lit a cigarette, drank a sip of tea, moved a few paces and then in a cold, polite and bored voice said:

"I am very sensible of the fact that I must apologise for having monopolised you for so long, but I will no longer stand in the path of your destiny. I shall go to Petersburg the day after to-morrow. I shall stay there for a week. I think this gap will be long enough for you to find among your Friday night friends the ninth lover to prepare the way for the tenth."

While he was still talking, he drew near to the electric bell on which he pressed a finger:

"Why are you ringing?" asked Ariane.

"You will know in good time," he replied.

A valet came in.

"Make up a bed on the couch here," Constantin ordered.

Ariane went into the bedroom. An hour later he crossed it on his way to the bathroom. Ariane was in bed, her face to the wall. As he was returning and was about to enter the sitting-room, she stopped him.

"Constantin," she said.

"What do you want?"

She turned a miserable little face bathed in tears to him, and holding out her arms, cried:

"Forgive me, I ought not to have spoken. . . . I do not know what induced me. . . . I cannot any more . . ."

He drew near to her.

"How can I be angry with you? You have given me much . . . and I shall not forget it. I, what am I? Am I wrong? Are you right? . . . We have been happy together all the same. But now it is over. Good-bye, little girl."

He took her in his arms and kissed her forehead.

She nestled close to him and covering his face with kisses, whispered:

"Stay."

He tore himself from her and kissing her once again, said:

"No, no, forgive me . . . I can not. . . ."

21 *The Secret*

They woke on the morning after the scene, aching with fatigue, as if they had just come through a violent bout of fever. Ariane was pale and silent. She crossed the suite noiselessly. She was doing her hair at the moment when Constantin was ready to leave her. His hand was already on the door handle.

"Are you not going to bid me good-bye?" she exclaimed.

He went to the girl and mechanically put his lips to her forehead.

"Are you lunching with me?" she asked.

"No, I am busy."

"But you are dining?"

"I am invited . . ."

"Oh, it is impossible," she cried. "It is our last evening . . ."

Tears which she did not try to hide sprang to her eyes.

"Very well," he answered indifferently. "Where do you want to dine?"

"Here. I am too hideous to go out to-day. You have made me cry. I am not used to it . . ."

While crossing the Marshals' Bridge during the afternoon, he caught sight of Ariane in the company of a medical student. "My successor," he thought. He looked at him closely. He was a young man with a sensitive clean-shaven face, fair hair, irregular features and an intelligent appearance. He was talking animatedly. "He will last a week," Constantin said to himself. Ariane was more than usually beautiful, her pale cheeks flushed with the sharp cold, her eyes glittering and her whole bearing displaying that illusive gracefulness which was hers only and from which one got a sensation of intense vitality. Motionless on the pavement Constantin followed them for a long time with his eyes. When the pair had disappeared in the crowd at the corner of the Neglinni Proyezd, he shrugged his shoulders and murmured:

"Let us go."

He had not a free moment during the afternoon. Nevertheless he found the time to telephone Natacha. He talked to his friend for some time, told her of his departure for Petersburg and of his early return. "Have a dinner ready for me," he said. "It must be a great occasion. I shall think of you from the banks of the Neva. Do not forget me."

He regained his hotel in the evening. He was tired and dreaded these last hours with Ariane. He would still have to fight. He opened the door of his suite with the nervousness of a tamer entering the cage where a young and unbroken panther waits for him, growling.

Ariane Nicolaevna had put on an extremely smart evening dress for the dinner. She had dressed herself in vivid blue silk pyjamas with a wide cherry sash girdling her waist. The soft coat yawned over her bare chest. Her loosened hair was tied at the neck with a ribbon of the same blue as the pyjamas, and below that fell free to below her waist. She had pinned a blood-red rose into her hair above one ear and had put on dancing slippers. She was in a radiant mood. There had been no yesterday; there would be no to-morrow.

"Do you like me like this?" she asked, advancing towards him in a flippant way and bowing deeply.

Constantin looked at her with surprise. It was a new Ariane who stood before him, a shy and mischievous youth, a page who might have stepped out of one of Shakespeare's comedies, from whose curved lips would spurt a hail of sparkling railleries. He was enraptured at the idea that this disguise would lend an unexpected colour to their last evening, and replied:

"You are charming. I am ordering caviare and champagne."

Ariane played her part to admiration. She was bubbling with wit and gaiety. On a moment, she leaned towards Constantin and asked him:

"Great Prince, please, later, when you have forgotten how provoking I am and when you come back again, say you will ask me to supper? Oh, nothing but supper. You see, you will still meet a number of women. They will have a thousand virtues that I have not; they will be good, submissive, affectionate, faithful—all the same, I am faithful for I have not betrayed you—lovelier than I am, possibly. But listen closely to what I am going to say. You will find it dull in their company, and you will think of the 'little beast' who has been maddening you in Moscow for nearly a year. Besides," she said, leaning further towards him and talking nearly into his ear, "do you think you will forget my flaming youth? . . . Is it easy to pick up?"

"You are right," replied Constantin, "I shall not forget you, for you are a highly flavoured mixture in which the exquisite and the detestable are wedded, after which all the rest should seem savourless."

"Still, we must part," the girl went on. "It would be too absurd for creatures like you and me, who are made to seek adventure, to live like married couples. But listen, I shall have a great secret to entrust to you before we part, something which you must never repeat, for I should die of shame. Swear!"

"I will swear to anything you please," said Constantin, who, at the moment of losing the girl, felt himself once

again seized by the passionate desire to penetrate a little further into her closed heart.

"Well, I will tell you to-morrow," she went on, "to-morrow on the platform when the three bells sound, at the moment at which the train will go, when there will be no chance for you to turn in your tracks. . . . And if I have not the courage at the last minute to make this confession, I will write to you. . . . I promise."

It was in vain that Constantin tried to make Ariane speak. He could get nothing from her save her solemn promise that he would soon know a secret which she had been long burning to impart to him.

He puzzled in his mind to guess what the girl had to reveal. Knowing Ariane and the adamantine hardness of her self-esteem, he discovered a track which led him to the truth. This proud girl loved him but she would die before she would let him see it. She loved him, she had always loved him; that was the secret which she would not surrender until the moment when they parted from each other.

This certainly filled him with a gloomy joy. "Ah!" he thought, "I have won the victory. She has fought with a smile on her lips, but she has recognised that she is beaten. This untameable girl has found her master. . . . And, nevertheless, everything is over between us. She has made love impossible . . ." At that moment, Constantin loathed her.

They slept in each other's arms.

22. A Grey February Day

On the following day (it was a grey February morning) they woke late. Constantin rose first. When he was dressed—it was past eleven o'clock—Ariane decided to get out of bed.

She was seated on a chair with her back turned to Constantin who was at the end of the room, watching the charming delicate silhouette of his mistress outlined against

the window through which a pale yellow light filtered.

Suddenly without looking at her lover, being fully occupied in examining a silk stocking in the foot of which she had found a hole, she remarked in a casual voice, as if she were asking him to ring for the chambermaid:

"What is the use of your being intelligent and superior to other men? Do you really not know that I was innocent when you took me and that no man had ever touched me?"

The words fell into the silence of the room. It seemed to Constantin as if his heart had stopped, as if the room had suddenly brightened, become immense . . . He thought he would faint. At the actual moment the girl was speaking, he realised that at last he had reached the truth. The recollection of the first night burst on his memory like a thunderclap; he heard that humble child's voice saying "I am not fighting." He recalled the resistance he had met . . . But there was no need of material evidence. A higher truth overlay the evidence and drove out his doubts as day the night.

Overwhelmed by the violence of the sensation that assailed him, he reeled. He could neither speak nor look Ariane in the face. How could he bear the lightning of her eyes? To hear her voice was beyond his strength. He needed solitude, the open air, a long walk. With an effort he pulled himself together, took a few steps across the room, reached the door and went out . . .

23. *Digressions*

For a long time Constantin wandered aimlessly across the city. His mind was blank. He walked slowly, his hands in the pockets of his fur coat, soaking in the myriad sights of the streets. He waited several minutes in the Sadovaya to watch a draught horse which had fallen on the slippery snow trying vainly to rise.

The wind pricked his face. He went on his way.

At moments his mind returned to Ariane slim and half-clad against the window. Mechanically, in a soundless whisper, he repeated the words she had uttered. No more now than at the actual moment did he question the truth of what she had said to him. The evidence was not to be gainsaid. It was like the burning bush in which God appeared to Moses. It dazzled and scorched him. He could bear neither its brightness nor its heat. For the moment, he closed his eyes and fled headlong like a night bird mazed with the midday sun.

He went into the Kremlin, penetrated into the Uspenski Cathedral, examined the ikons with pleasure. From the face of one of the Byzantine Virgins, he recaptured Ariane's long, black, arched eyebrows. She was still there. A scent of incense hung between the mosaic-covered walls. He was stifling.

On the terrace which commands the Moskva, by the monument to Alexander II, he suddenly began to talk volubly to himself. "Ah!" he said with savage joy, "now I know you, my pale imperious child! To-day I realise the intoxication of command which led you from the classrooms of the Známenski school to the bedrooms of the Hotel de Londres and even to that house in the suburbs. Your gaze, the strength of which I know, has seen men's desire quiver before you. But what was the miracle that made you conquer yourself and overcome that thirst for caresses which you have only quenched in my arms? And besides you have lived in a fevered town of the south. Around you couples twined and untwined. Aunt Varvara sang her lover's praises in your ears. Little Ariane, who have been mine only, you remained pure. Triumph of that arrogance which saved you and kept you for my kisses . . . Then came a day and we were face to face."

A flight of screaming rooks, passing just over his head, tore him for a moment from his reflections. He watched their manœuvres parallel with the white roofs of the city. The screeching troop wheeled and disappeared behind the palaces and convents. He broke forth again:

"At the moment she meets me, she feels herself lost. The

earth she trampled as a conqueror trembles beneath her feet. This haughty, disdainful girl sees she is about to fall into the arms of a man who does not know her, who will take her as a toy, who will cynically demand a few hours of her life to endure his evenings of exile in Moscow pleasantly. . . . So, I have left no room for any illusion! I have talked without circuitousness or hypocrisy. Nothing could be more cynical than the bargain I offer her. . . . Still she does not think of resisting. She has met her fate. But how she hates herself at that moment; she surrenders. . . . At the supreme moment she understands that she has still the choice to humble herself either before me or before herself. She does not falter. She takes the roughest road, but the one at whose end she will be able to live unashamed in her own eyes. . . . And for this reason, this passer-by shall hold in his arms a pliant, fickle girl who goes from man to man at her own pleasure. She consents to what I suggest to her as a wayfarer to whom hospitality is offered for a night, to be sent on her way the next day. . . . True, but at this cost she saves herself. She keeps an inner chamber where she meets herself unspotted. . . . What does the rest matter? What matters her lover and the opinion he may hold of her? . . . She lies, and, marvellous thing, at the instant she makes up her mind, she is able to deceive me with such art that the most apparent of material facts cannot tear the scales from my eyes. By the strength of her mind, she creates in me a certainty which nothing can dissolve. . . . Yet still, poor child, she has a moment of weakness. She does not remain mistress of her voice at the moment I am torturing her and struggling to possess her. She stammers like the frightened child she is; 'But I am not fighting!' And I had no inkling of the terrifying drama which was being played within her. I was blind and deaf. Only to-day do I see clearly; only now, Ariane, do I hear your call. . . ."

On the terrace swept by a cold wind, he waved his arms as he talked. The rare passers-by stopped, looked at him and went on their way. Suddenly he calmed himself and drew out his watch. He was expected at his office. "Let them wait," he thought, and again started on his wandering road.

Some flakes of icy snow which the wind bore in whorls, fell from the murky sky.

He did not stop thinking of Ariane's deception. In a flash, she had recognised her dilemma and at once had raised herself to a point which made him giddy. At the thought of her poised so high, he suffered the anguish one feels in following the spectacle of an acrobat who, in the flies of the circus, performs a trick which may cost him his life.

But the wonder was that she had had the heroism to play this breakneck part through nearly a year of daily companionship. She had been able to keep up the deception during the changing course of days and nights. The more she loved him the more she hid herself from him, finding in her arrogance the strength to wage an impossible battle. She could see the baleful effects of her tactics on her lover. He bullied her; he made her cry. And, perhaps, he would never be able to come to love her when he had painted in his mind so hateful a portrait of herself. She had borne this thought; she had undergone these humiliations. But through the anguish and the tears she had secretly triumphed. He humbled her more and more, and more and more her spirits swelled.

And meanwhile in the heat of the battle she wore herself away. She was in love. One cannot put love in its place. Once born, it invades the whole being. It had leapt at the throat of her pride and striven to beat it to the ground. Every incident of their long ten months was written in blood, since for the defeats she had undergone, she had taken her revenge on Constantín. He marked the dramatic progression, and could retrace the recent steps. There was the story of the little house in the suburbs, a tale intolerable by the ambiguity it contained; then the more loathsome hours passed in the arms of Varvara Petrovna's lover, the doctor, and, at last, at long last, the full list of those who for a night, a week, or a month had possessed her. . . . Now the cup was full. She was at the end of her strength; the superhuman pride which had sustained her was broken She could lie no more. . . . A more powerful sentiment over

bore her. She was love itself. Then the simple, bare confession of the truth with neither gesture nor stress, infinitely more poignant by the even tone in which it was made.

Constantin stood bewildered in the face of this inconceivable duel. He compared the child's heroism with the immeasurable greatness of the love which had led her that morning to surrender to him.

Suddenly an abrupt change of ideas side-tracked him. He was surprised to find himself calling words which quivered on the icy air.

"Oh, if I had only known! if I had only known! Ariane, what have you done?"

He cried the words so loudly that the sound of his voice terrified him. He grew silent, overwhelmed by the new flood of thoughts which rose in him. . . . He drew a picture of an Ariane from the first day sincere. With what gentleness he would have treated her! How patiently he would have laid siege to that proud heart and to that sealed body! What affection would have sprung between them! He would have taken her at last, but how he would have surrendered himself! But here by the implacable will of Ariane he had been constrained to defend himself against her. With a kind of madness he had battled not to love her, not to bind himself.

"Ah!" he said dully, "why have you deceived me? . . . How can one retrace one's footsteps? Too late, too late," he reiterated in despair . . . "There can be no resurrection of what has never existed."

Inexpressible grief stabbed his heart. Without looking for reasons, he felt that it would be impossible for him to see his mistress again. How would her eyes look at him? What could he say to her? In what voice could he speak to her?

With these passionate and contradictory sentiments warring in him there mingled a dull, intense rage against the girl. Now that he saw Ariane in her true light, he detested her. By what refinement of mischief had she had the strength to torture him so long? She had savoured a

satanic pleasure from it. Cruelly and insensibly she had bent herself to her revenge. . . . A sublime mixture of love and hatred, wherein honour and deceit, loyalty and trickery were strangely mingled. How disgusting and how magnificent! . . . Still he was at the end of his strength. . . . A year of daily punishment had exhausted him. What pleasure did he feel now in knowing that she had been his, unsullied? It was only pain. He saw her as opposed to him as she had always been. The old wounds still dripped. . . . He had one thought only: to flee, to be alone at last; to forget this hell. Yes, depart for Petersburg this very night. . . . But he must call at his hotel for his luggage. . . . He would reach it at the last moment. . . . Perhaps she would have gone out, tired of waiting. . . . So, to leave a message, a message to say that he was going away and would, no doubt, come back. . . . But he would never come back. . . .

He looked round him.

He was standing in front of the little house in the Arbat where Natacha lived. "It is not chance that led me hither," he thought.

At the moment that he entered his friend's house, he knew what he was going to say to her. He had come to break with her. By the fact that he was leaving Ariane, he was renouncing Natacha. He saw it in his mind like an axiom which one lays down and does not explain. An hour later he left the house. And behind him his friend was weeping on the couch where he had left her.

An abrupt change had taken place in him. He was calm; he thought of his journey, of his business. He betook himself to his office. There it came to him that he must know what was happening to Ariane, that he would speak to her by telephone. She could no longer make him suffer or give him happiness. For the first time in a year he felt a free man. However, at the moment of calling, he started back. . . . Why, indeed, not see her before his departure? Why not dine with her, simply, as with someone he had known long ago and who had become indifferent to him?

He called a bellboy and gave him an oral message to carry.

"You will say accurately—mind my words: 'Constantin Michel's compliments to Ariane Nicolaevna and will she dine with him this evening? He is taking the ten o'clock train.' "

When the boy came back, Constantin examined him roughly:

"What was Ariane Nicolaevna doing? . . . What did she reply?"

"Ariane Nicolaevna was in the middle of telephoning. She was laughing as she talked. . . . She stopped, listened to me and simply answered 'All right'; then she went on with her conversation."

An hour later Constantin reached the hotel. Before he went in, he knew that he would experience no emotion at seeing Ariane again. He greeted her in a natural voice but did not kiss her. He was frozen to the roots of his being and insensible. The girl was neither gay nor melancholy, neither sentimental nor cynical. She helped him pack his papers and belongings. At table they chatted in an even tone on topics of no importance. The question of the hotel suite was not touched on. After dinner as he was closing his bags she handed him some sandwiches for the journey which she had herself cut and wrapped in white paper tied with a blue ribbon.

She accompanied him to the station, saw him into his compartment, took a rose from her blouse and put it into a glass. Then they got out on to the platform to wait for the starting signal.

Constantin had linked his arm with the girl's. He did not talk. He was extremely tired and thought of nothing. At intervals, Ariane stealthily looked at him. Used to reading her lover's features, she had understood from his pallor and the wrinkles deepened beneath his eyes, that he was passing through a terrible crisis. But still, had he no word for her? Would he leave her thus alone in the night? Was he going, never to return? She was silent, not daring to ask one question. Minutes sped by; anguish filled her heart. The tension between the lovers reached its limit. It seemed as if nothing would break the silence in which they had

wrapped themselves and that the separation hovered on the brink of eternity.

The three strokes of the bell rang out to which the engine's whistle replied. Constantin kissed the girl without uttering a word. Now he was standing on the lowest step of the carriage stairs. The train quivered with pain. Ariane was fighting not to faint. She raised her eyes to her lover. He saw them filling with tears. . . . Suddenly, hooking himself by one hand to the rail of the coach, he leaned forward, encircled the girl with his other arm, lifted her to him, carried her into the compartment. He slammed the door and fell with her on to the seat.

"What are you doing?" she stammered. "You are mad!"

"Hush," he said. . . . "Oh, please . . . hush!"

And he covered her face with silent kisses.

About the author

Becker and Maass

CLAUDE ANET

Considered something of an authority on love, particularly after the publication of *Ariane*, Claude Anet, French-Swiss novelist, playwright, art critic and historian, lectured widely in this country in the twenties—not only on love, but on literature, art and archeology. Born Jean Schopfer in Morges, Switzerland, in 1868, he was educated at the Sorbonne and the Ecole du Louvre. (His euphonious pseudonym, the name of an obscure French writer of the past, was adopted when he published his first collection of tales in 1901.) Besides philosophy, literature and the arts, which were his specialties, he loved sports, and in 1892 he became the tennis champion of France. For a time, he represented an American concern in Paris. Later, as a journalist, he traveled extensively in Europe, then in Russia where he witnessed the revolution. When he found himself *persona non grata* with the Soviets, he fled to the Arctic in June 1918.

From 1910 until his death in 1931, he lived with his wife and daughter in a sumptuous mansion in Paris. On his walls hung Roussels and Vuillards and portraits of his favorite writers—Stendhal, Dostoievsky, Poe—and his tables and bookcases cluttered with souvenirs of his trips: Egyptian statuettes, P miniatures. He translated Omar Khayyam's quatrains Pushkin's *Tale of Tsar Saltan*, and projected his knowle Russian life in the novels which made him famous the over. Among his plays was *Mayerling*, which became a hi it was filmed after his death.

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